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## **Change on Tap for Nashville: The Telegraph and News Content, 1860**

**Frank E. Fee Jr.**

The telegraph is widely believed to have brought significant changes in newspaper journalism in the nineteenth century but relatively few studies have explored the nature of that change. Economies in the face of expensive transmission costs are generally held to have spawned the summary lead and inverted pyramid style for organizing a news story as Civil War reporters filed dispatches from the battlefields.<sup>1</sup> Historian Richard A. Schwarzlose has described how telegraph technology led to the development of news collectives, such as the Associated Press.<sup>2</sup> In terms of content, historian Donald L. Shaw demonstrated how in the later nineteenth century the need to be marketable to newspapers of different political persuasions led to a more-neutral presentation of telegraph news and the reduction of bias in presidential political news in Wisconsin.<sup>3</sup> These studies of how the telegraph changed story forms, the dissemination of

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce D. Itule and Douglas A. Anderson, *News Writing and Reporting for Today's Media*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994), 58.

<sup>2</sup> Richard A. Schwarzlose, "Early Telegraphic News Dispatches: Forerunner of the AP," *Journalism Quarterly* 51 (Summer 1974):595-601.

<sup>3</sup> Donald L. Shaw, "News Bias and the Telegraph: A Study of Historical Change," *Journalism Quarterly* 44 (Spring 1967): 3-12.

news, and content suggest further opportunities to enrich understanding of how the technology altered journalism in the nineteenth century.

This study examines news coverage in the *Nashville* (Tennessee) *Daily Gazette* in 1860 to expand analysis of how the telegraph affected news coverage and presentation. It offers insights into how, on the eve of the Civil War, editors were experimenting with a technology less than twenty years old.<sup>4</sup> The study further posits a reciprocal action of interest in important far-away events creating demand for news, and technology that could produce news or the ingredients of news stories faster than traditional means. This helped fuel significant changes in news enactment and presentation in a relatively short span. All *Gazette* stories in January and June 1860 were studied to determine the paper's use of stories identifiable as arriving by telegraph, in contrast with those derived from local production or reprinting from exchange papers.

The *Nashville Daily Gazette* in 1860 claimed in its Page One masthead to be its city's "Official Journal — Having the Largest Circulation."<sup>5</sup> However, actual figures were not disclosed in the newspaper despite occasional references to its circulation dominance, and secondary sources shed no more light on the numbers.

Throughout the first six months of 1860, the *Nashville Daily Gazette* was published Tuesday through Sunday mornings, a four-page broadsheet in which the front

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<sup>4</sup> Use of the telegraph to transmit news has been identified as occurring soon after 1845-1846. Schwarzlose, 596. In Nashville, TN, the first telegraphic message was received in 1848. *Nashville/Davidson County Time Line*, Nashville Historical Commission and the Public Library of Nashville and Davidson County, January 1996.

<sup>5</sup> *Nashville Daily Gazette*, 1 January 1860, p. 1. (In notes hereafter, *Gazette*. Since all citations to the *Gazette* are for the year 1860, the year will be omitted in subsequent footnotes.)

and back covers were exclusively for advertising.<sup>6</sup> News items, sometimes with comment that in these days would be called editorializing and sometimes fairly straight recitations of facts, appeared on the second and third pages, although these items shared space with additional advertising that in modern terms might be described as display and classified advertising. The news columns also contained locally written commentary.

The publisher was James T. Bell & Co., with James T. Bell and “M. V.B. Haile” the apparent principals in the company. However, James R. Bruce was listed as editor on the Page Two masthead, while James T. Bell was listed in the Page Three masthead as “local and commercial editor.”

### **Printers’ exchanges**

Like many papers in this period, the *Gazette* appears to have subscribed to a large number of newspapers from around the country,<sup>7</sup> including those of the North, and it frequently reprinted news items from these other newspapers. Occasional news items thanking individuals for bringing “late papers in advance of the mails”<sup>8</sup> suggest that postal exchanges were less expeditious and reliable conduits for these exchange papers than individuals bringing out of town papers by railroad to Nashville.

Occasionally a reprint was preceded or followed by a comment from the Nashville editor, underscoring that the gatekeeping was not perfunctory. For instance, when the *Louisville Courier* reported, “A dead dog has been laying on Second street,

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<sup>6</sup> A fuller, albeit still sketchy, discussion of the *Gazette* and the Nashville newspaper scene is offered in Appendix I.

<sup>7</sup> Richard B. Kielbowicz, “Newsgathering by Printers’ Exchanges Before the Telegraph,” *Journalism History* 9 (Summer 1982): 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Gazette*, 8 June, p. 3.

between main [sic] and Market for several days,” the *Gazette* quipped, “You would hardly expect a live one to lie there that long, would you?”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, a shooting reported in an item clipped from the Springfield, Missouri, *Mirror*<sup>10</sup> was blamed on one John Owen. The *Gazette* appended the information that “John Owen will be remembered by some of our readers as the man who some years since killed his brother, Richard Owen, in Williamson county, Tenn. He then fled from the State and was never tried for that crime.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, it might be reasonable to see in the selection of articles gleaned from out-of-town newspapers the exercise of editorial discretion and mindset, predisposition, or bias. A general reading of the *Gazette* for this period fails to show a particular pattern in what news items were picked up from other papers, although politics, calamity, unusual occurrences, and social notes predominate.

### **Telegraph news**

A review of the *Gazette*’s news columns suggests that the telegraph was becoming increasingly important in delivering news to the newspaper throughout the first six months of 1860. A fixture on Page Three each day was a column at times labeled “Latest News By Telegraph!”<sup>12</sup> but more often simply “Telegraphic.”<sup>13</sup> These telegraph news columns varied in length but whether because of available telegraph news or available space on the page is speculative. Each item in the column carried a line

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<sup>9</sup> *Gazette*, 5 January, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> “Shooting Affray,” *Ibid.*, 13 January, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Such comment, not uncommon for the period, shows how libel laws have changed the language of police reporting since the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>12</sup> *Gazette*, 1 June, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Gazette*, 2 June, p. 2.

identifying a city and a date, and examination of the datelines suggests that these identify the city and date of telegraph transmission and not necessarily where and when the event occurred.<sup>14</sup>

Except for the placement of advertising on pages One and Four and generally putting non-local news on Page Two and local, state and regional<sup>15</sup> news on Page Three, the greatest formatting of the paper is apparent in the telegraph column. Staple headlines and topics in the column included “From Washington,” “River News,” “Steamer Arrived,”<sup>16</sup> “Foreign,” “Pony Express,”<sup>17</sup> “Arrival of the Overland Mail,” and “New Orleans (or, New York) Markets.” Other items entered the telegraph column episodically and their selection often suggests early influences of the modern journalistic news typologies (conflict, unusualness, proximity, prominence, impact, and, increasingly, timeliness). For other items, the rationale for news enactment is less clear. For instance, it remains for further social history research to determine what Nashville readers made of

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<sup>14</sup> An example is the continuing news interest in Garibaldi’s fight for Italian independence. Most often this telegraph coverage featured dates the items were transmitted from New York City, with the city identified in the dateline. It appears that virtually all of the Garibaldi coverage initially came to the United States via trans-Atlantic steamers arriving in New York from Europe. See, for instance, *Gazette*, 12 June 1860, p. 2. The practice of datelining material where the information was obtained rather than where the action occurred remains an Associated Press convention today. See, Norman Goldstein, ed., *The Associated Press Stylebook* 31st ed. (New York: The Associated Press, 1996), 57.

<sup>15</sup> This is an impressionistic observation since further study would be necessary before one could reliably identify what in 1860 was a Nashville reader’s idea of his or her “region.” The principle criterion used here is the frequency of mention of non-Nashville municipalities. Hence, Louisville, KY, appears to be within Nashville’s “region” by virtue of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad link, although they are more than 150 miles apart. By comparison, Chattanooga, less than 75 miles distant, received considerably less mention in the *Gazette* during the 1860 months studied, although it, too, was linked by rail.

<sup>16</sup> Often this headline was rendered more specific with the name of the vessel, e.g., “Arrival of the Great Eastern,” *Gazette*, 29 June, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, news in this period alternately moved no faster than a horse or a steamship until it reached a telegraph office, from which it sped to newspapers throughout the country. See, for instance, Arthur C. Carey, “Effects of the Pony Express and the Transcontinental Telegraph Upon Selected California Newspapers,” *Journalism Quarterly* 51 (Summer 1974): 320-322.

the one-sentence telegraph report, “The Cricket match between the St. George, New York and a Philadelphia club was won by the former with 6 crickets to spare.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Growing telegraph influence**

In a comparison of the January and June editions of the *Gazette* for 1860, the growing influence of the telegraph on the paper’s news coverage is seen in at least two ways. The telegraph report appears to have been an agenda-builder for the newspaper. It also seems to have enabled a shift toward more complete and more timely coverage of non-local events. As such, the telegraph report’s influence in creating greater awareness of other regions through the immediacy of its news may merit further scholarly attention.

The agenda-building influence of the telegraph may be seen anecdotally in the frequency of references outside the telegraph news column to information supplied by telegraph. In the first month of the year, only two locally produced stories or comments in the general columns of pages Two and Three specifically referred to the telegraph as their source. Most of the non-local stories are attributed to other newspapers throughout the country, attesting to the complexity of the editors’ exchange network. Even when no source was identified, the nature of the news item and the comparative fullness of even a one- or two-paragraph report suggests its origin in the editors’ exchange rather than the telegraph, where the typical report gives no more than a single cryptic sentence to each subject.

Although its use was confined chiefly to the “Telegraphic” column in the *Gazette*, the telegraph was beginning to influence news judgment and presentation. While in

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<sup>18</sup> “Cricket Match,” *Gazette*, 8 June, p. 2.

January only two locally prepared items refer to the telegraph, three of the exchange paper items attributed their information to telegraph dispatches.<sup>19</sup> Also, a subscription advertisement carried several times for the *Louisville Journal* boasted that its “network of telegraph all over the Union enables them to report all events of public interest almost simultaneously with their occurrence.”<sup>20</sup> Of the two locally produced items mentioning the telegraph, one on January 8 reported, in its entirety, “We learn by a telegraph dispatch received in this city yesterday, that a large and destructive fire occurred in Hickman, Ky., on Wednesday night last, which destroyed the Commercial Hotel and several storehouses.”<sup>21</sup>

The other story on the telegraph that drew local attention in the *Gazette* that month may offer insight into the editors’ criteria for news in the South of 1860, dealing, as it did, with disaster, great loss of life, and a New England textile mill purported to have been shoddily constructed. On January 12, the lead item on Page Two began, “Our readers were yesterday informed by a brief telegraphic despatch [sic], of the falling of the Pemberton Mills, at Lawrence, Mass., and the consequent destruction of human life.”<sup>22</sup> The information in this comparatively long (135 words) item was further updated by an item in the telegraph column on that page reporting that fire had broken out as rescuers

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<sup>19</sup> *Huntsville Independent* item in *Gazette*, 3 January, p. 3; *Louisville Journal* item in *Gazette*, 5 January, p. 3; “Cincinnati *Gazette* telegraphic correspondent,” *Gazette*, 27 January, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> “The *Louisville Journal*,” *Gazette*, 3 January, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> “Fire at Hickman, Ky.,” *Gazette*, 8 January, p. 3. In this instance, the telegraph’s ability to speed news is moot because the Sunday story’s reference to “Wednesday night last” would date the fire less than 150 miles from Nashville to January 4.

<sup>22</sup> “Heart-Sickening Calamity,” *Gazette*, 12 January, p. 2.

sought survivors in the in the rubble of the collapsed mill.<sup>23</sup> The next day, the *Gazette* devoted more than a column of news space to an extensive report on the mill disaster.<sup>24</sup> The source of that story, datelined “Lawrence, Mass, Jan 10,” was not identified, but although after a summary lead it was assembled in consecutive dispatches, the length, vivid prose, and use of the first-person are uncharacteristic of telegraph stories in the *Gazette* at this time. It seems likely this was picked up from one of the exchange papers, some of which had wire reporters at this time.<sup>25</sup>

In general, items found in the *Gazette*’s telegraph column are short in length and detail and rely on reader knowledge for context and meaning. For instance, an item datelined Independence (Missouri), June 8, reported simply, “Six companies are on the Red Riquer [sic]<sup>26</sup> after the Indians. The Navajoes [sic] attacked Fort Defiance and were repulsed.”<sup>27</sup> Under the “Washington” headline that day, the column reported, in its entirety, “Senate — Green reported adversely to the Utah petition asking admission as a State.”<sup>28</sup>

Examination of succeeding days’ papers shows that generally the telegraph news items were not followed up with larger stories taken either from the telegraph or the

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<sup>23</sup> “Ruins of Pemberton Mill,” *Ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> “The Lawrence Calamity,” *Gazette*, 13 January, p. 3. Interestingly, a subheadline said “Two Hundred Operatives Burned in the Ruins,” although in the last paragraph of the successive dispatches compiled to create the story the anonymous reporter said, “I think it is much over estimated in the number killed,” and placed the number of dead or missing at 115.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, “Louisville Journal,” *Gazette*, 3 January, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Although typographical and fact errors were not uncommon in the *Gazette* during the period studied, the telegraph column appeared to have more typos than were found in other news columns.

<sup>27</sup> *Gazette*, 9 June, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> “From Washington,” *ibid*.



exchange papers. Exceptions to that finding, however, include the continuing telegraph and exchange coverage of Garibaldi's revolt in Italy, Indian wars in the West, tornadoes in the Midwest, a bloody insurrection in Japan, and the United States' national political contests, which in late spring were a growing staple in the news columns. At first glance, the predictive capacity of this analysis suggests conflict or disaster as the salient news values shared by the spartan telegraph reports and fuller accounts from other sources. On closer inspection, however, it might be argued that aside from the weather there was a preoccupation with struggles for legitimacy and self-determination that framed news selection in this period, at least in the South. It is a question that merits further scholarly study.

### **Telegraph news at midyear**

The number of news stories in June 1860 that referenced the telegraph (e.g., "The telegraph announces the failure of A.T. Wells, a heavy dealer in dry goods at Memphis. He went in for \$250,000"<sup>29</sup>) exceeds those of January of that year. Moreover, in June there appear stories that, in contrast to January, combined individual telegraph reports to produce a separate, fully developed news story.<sup>30</sup> On June 4 a telegraph item datelined Louisville reported, "There was a violent but brief storm of wind and rain this

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<sup>29</sup> *Gazette*, 8 June, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> As near as could be determined from examining other issues of the paper from February through May, this was the first actual combining of separate telegraph reports to form a news narrative.

afternoon.”<sup>31</sup> The next day, the telegraph column was marked by a considerably longer-than-average report on the weather, using the Louisville area storms as an organizing point:

The storm North and South of here did great damage, Louisville comparatively escaped. There was a terrible tornado in Eastern Iowa and Northwestern Illinois on the night of the 3d. Camanche, Iowa, and Albany, Illinois, on the opposite side of the river were completely demolished. In the former place, thirty-two dead bodies have been recovered and in the latter some twenty. In Alton, Illinois, the loss by the storm Saturday night exceeded \$100,000, Northern Missouri also suffered extensively.<sup>32</sup>

This coverage retained the style of the telegraph column in giving one sentence to a summary of a single news event, but it was exceptional in collecting a number related events under a single, unifying theme: the violent weather. Two days later, however, a relatively unusual approach to news coverage was taken when the *Gazette* appeared to write its own story from telegraph accounts. Datelined “Chicago, June 5,” the story began, “From telegraphic dispatches received last night and this morning, we learn the following further particulars of the tornado of Sunday evening.”<sup>33</sup> There followed, in ten paragraphs, an account of the tornado’s destruction, organized chronologically and geographically following the line of the storm.

Another change in the approach to the telegraph news occurred later in covering a “Democratic Constitutional Convention,” dubbed a “seceder’s convention,” that met in

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<sup>31</sup> *Gazette*, 5 June, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Gazette*, 6 June, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> “Further Particulars of the Great Tornado,” *Gazette*, 8 June, p. 2. The authorship of this story is, of course, conjectural. The analysis here is based on assuming the “we” is an editorial “we” representing the *Gazette*. Using a Chicago dateline could suggest the compilation was done in that city, but the dateline style of the telegraph column would not preclude using an out-of-town dateline on a locally written story. In any event, whether written in Nashville or elsewhere, the compiling of telegraph news to create a separate story appears to have been a relatively novel approach in the *Gazette* in early 1860.

Richmond, Virginia, in mid-June prior to the Democratic presidential nominating convention in Baltimore later that month. Here there is no suggestion of re-writing telegraph accounts, in fact, earlier items appear relatively intact even when newer developments are appended to them. Thus, on June 14 the *Gazette's* telegraph column carried an item datelined "Richmond, June 11" that summarized the "program for tomorrow in the Seceder's Convention."<sup>34</sup> This story was followed immediately by one datelined "Richmond, June 12" that reported, in the order of the agenda, what took place that day.<sup>35</sup>

In the Baltimore convention coverage, the telegraph was used to update developments, although whether the telegraph dispatches were incorporated in the full news stories is difficult to determine. For instance, on June 22 the *Gazette* began its coverage with an unattributed story datelined Baltimore, June 20,<sup>36</sup> that in its flowing prose is not at all like the telegraph copy. This fourteen paragraph story was immediately followed in the news columns by one paragraph dated June 19 and attributed to "Special Despatch [sic]."<sup>37</sup> In form and approach, this story is much closer to the telegraph style of summarizing rather than chronological development. However, it is not known whether this was indeed a report sent by telegraph. In the sequence of news stories the *Gazette* compiled that day, the next item was a one-paragraph story taken from the *New York*

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<sup>34</sup> "Democratic Constitutional Convention," *Gazette*, 14 June, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Gazette*, 22 June, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

*Tribune* of June 19,<sup>38</sup> followed by another “Special Dispatch” dated June 20,<sup>39</sup> followed by two more short items, both dated June 20 but whose source or authorship was not mentioned.<sup>40</sup>

Besides the news columns’ coverage of the parliamentary maneuvering that had gone on at least two days earlier in the convention, the telegraph wire for June 22 provided readers updated information under a June 21 dateline, including the latest on a credentials fight.<sup>41</sup> The telegraph report on the convention led with:

The reading of the Journal was dispensed with when the flooring over the Orchester [sic] gave way letting a portion of the New York and Pennsylvania delegation into the orchestra box. Nobody was hurt but great excitement. A recess of one hour was taken to repair.<sup>42</sup>

The *Gazette* continued to give the convention dual treatment. Traditional coverage came from exchange papers, such as an extensive collection of “exclusive dispatches to the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*”<sup>43</sup> published June 23 but whose datelines read June 20. As the convention drama grew, however, so did apparent use of the telegraph. In the telegraph column next to the Cincinnati exchange stories were two full-

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “Baltimore Convention,” Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> “Aspects of the Third Day,” *Gazette*, 23 June, p. 2.

fledged convention updates datelined June 22.<sup>44</sup> From the customary single summary sentence, telegraph items had grown to four and five paragraphs each.

As the telegraph stories became more expansive, however, they still retained an economy not necessarily found in the exchange papers' accounts. For instance, the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial's* reporter, identified only as "H.M.," provided this colorful rendering of the convention:

The city swarms like a bee hive. All parties know that the fight comes in the morning. Immense crowds fill Monument square. The usual rival mass meetings are simultaneously roaring. Two sets of speakers are *ding-donging* and playing the same old *rub-a-dub* tune for and against Douglas — a thousand voices keep incessantly crying "Yancey! Yancey! Yancey! — bands playing — Roman candles exploding — side-walks thronged everywhere.<sup>45</sup>

By comparison, the voice of this telegraph story, in its entirety, is constrained:

Baltimore, June 21 — The New York delegation have resolved to sustain the majority report of the Committee on Credentials. An exciting and acrimonious [sic] discussion occurred principally between Montgomery and Randall, of Penn., resulting in a street fight between Randall's son and Montgomery. A duel is anticipated.<sup>46</sup>

This and other examples suggest that the telegraph news was more immediate but also, even when liberated from the single-sentence reports, remained truncated and drier than exchange paper copy. A tornado and the convention give only limited opportunities to assess news by telegraph compared with the paper's traditional newsgathering and presentation. Nevertheless, some of the trade-offs between immediacy and expanded sense of proximity on the one hand, and color and style on the other are apparent in these early examples. However, the telegraph's looming transcendence was attested by the

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<sup>44</sup> "Democratic Convention," *Gazette*, 3 June, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> "Aspects of the Third Day," *Gazette*, 23 June, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> "Democratic Convention," *Gazette*, 23 June, p. 2.

*Gazette*'s lead story on Sunday, June 24, 1860, in which appeared the only "today" story detected in this research:

The telegraph *this morning* announces the termination of the National Democratic Convention at Baltimore. The Convention proper nominated Mr. Douglas for the Presidency, and Mr. Fitzpatrick, of Alabama, for the Vice Presidency. The Seceders subsequently met in Convention and nominated Mr. Breckenridge, of Kentucky, for the Presidency, and Mr. Lane, of Oregon, for the Vice Presidency. Our Democratic friends, therefore, have two tickets to choose from. We congratulate them on their good fortune.<sup>47</sup>

### **Growing telegraph reliance**

Examination of Nashville's *Daily Gazette* for January and June 1860 suggest that the telegraph had a growing importance in the paper's newsgathering throughout the first six months of the year. In this relatively short time, the telegraph appears to have become more central to the news budget and with it came a greater sense of immediacy that began to produce news items written from telegraph reports rather than exchange paper reprints. Such coverage was given greater prominence in the paper when the pivotal debates and decisions of the presidential nominations were taking place. The *Gazette* and presumably its competitors apparently could not wait on the customary channels of the exchange papers or make do with the skeleton briefs of the traditional telegraph news columns when momentous events were occurring in far off Baltimore that summer. And with that capability there is a suggestion in reading the news columns that a greater sense of connectedness with other communities outside the local area may have been taking place.<sup>48</sup> Whether the apparent changes in news philosophy and practices seen in

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<sup>47</sup> "The Baltimore Convention," *Gazette*, 24 June, p. 2. Emphasis added.

<sup>48</sup> As noted above, the *Gazette* carried extensive exchange paper items from throughout the United States. Closer textual analysis might suggest, however, that with timeliness a factor the news stories suggested greater relevance of non-local news in readers' lives.

comparing January and June marked a turning point in coverage and perspective requires further analysis of previous and subsequent publication years and across a wider sample of newspapers.

This study also yields a number of questions for further research but nonetheless offers a glimpse of the change in the use, importance, and influence of the telegraph in reporting news in the telegraph's infancy. Although the study's scope is limited, it is important in the questions it raises about the effect of the technologies of the day on newsgathering. Also raised in the examination are questions of relationships among competing journalists in a more rough and tumble era, how journalists used the expanding flow of information reaching their offices, how the typology of news may have been changing at this time as a consequence of the technology, and what themes may have been early, albeit unattended, harbingers of the Civil War in the next year.

## APPENDIX I

By 1860, Nashville had a lively and long-standing newspaper heritage. In 1799, the city's first newspaper, the *Rights of Man, or The Nashville Intelligencer*, began publication,<sup>49</sup> to be joined a year later by the *Tennessee Gazette*, whose editor, Benjamin Bradford, was at one time mayor of Nashville.<sup>50</sup> The relatively scant secondary literature mentioning Nashville newspapers does hint at the variety and political leaning of the various newspapers and also how Nashville's newspapers rose, fell and combined over the years. Mentioned are *The Clarion and Tennessee State Gazette*, April 18, 1815;<sup>51</sup> *Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser*, March 13, 1819;<sup>52</sup> *Nashville Whig*, October 17, 1828;<sup>53</sup> *Nashville True Whig*, December 28, 1850;<sup>54</sup> *Republican Banner*, 1852;<sup>55</sup> *Nashville Daily Union*, 1852;<sup>56</sup> and *Republican Daily Banner and Nashville Whig*, August 24, 1852.<sup>57</sup>

It is interesting to speculate on the nature of competition and interdependence among several newspapers operating in the same time and place in this era. Besides

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<sup>49</sup> John Egerton, ed. *Nashville: The Faces of Two Centuries, 1780-1980* (Nashville, TN: PlusMedia, 1979).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> F. Garvin Davenport, *Cultural Life in Nashville: On the Eve of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 197.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Egerton, 107.



publishing items found in exchange papers from elsewhere in the country, the *Gazette's* editors used stories from their fellow Nashville journalists as well. Said the *Gazette* on June 27:

Our estimable friend, Jno. C. Burch, of the *Union and American*, who was in Baltimore during the Democratic Convention, was certainly not an inactive observer of the enthusiasm attending the nomination of the Breckinridge ticket. We guess so at least from the despatches [sic] he sent his paper. Here they are.<sup>58</sup>

There followed a pickup from the *Union and American*, although the reprinting's intent seems likely to have been to tweak the rival for its frequent use of the phrases "greatest enthusiasm prevails" and "wildest enthusiasm prevails" at the Breckinridge ticket.<sup>59</sup> The *Gazette's* comment on the *Union and American* item was, "Relying implicitly on the integrity of Mr. Burch, we can but conclude that the nomination of Breckinridge and Lane was made in a perfect storm of all sorts of enthusiasm."<sup>60</sup>

A week earlier, however, the *Gazette* appears to have been in earnest when it told readers, "We copy this morning from the Nashville *Union and American* an account of the proceedings of the Democratic State Convention held in this city on Wednesday night."<sup>61</sup> It added:

Our obliging contemporaries of the paper from which we copy, kindly furnished us in compliance with a request, with the copy on Wednesday night, and our inability to get it in type for yesterday's issue of the *Gazette* is our only excuse for its non-appearance at that time.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "Various Sorts of Enthusiasm," *Gazette*, 27 June, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> "Democratic State Convention," *Gazette*, 20 January, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

A full report of the convention followed, attributed again to the *Union and American*.

Moreover, the local news business was news to the Nashville papers. In its news columns on June 3, 1860, the *Gazette* reported the demise of the *Nashville News* and its purchase by A.S. Camp & Co. of the *Patriot* office.<sup>63</sup> An apparent redesign of the *Nashville Banner* — “dressed up in a new and beautiful suit, which fits it with all the ease and grace imaginable”<sup>64</sup> — also drew favorable notice that day. The year began with a *Gazette* item calling attention to the start of the *National Pathfinder*, “a new Nashville paper. ... A good sized sheet, filled with interesting matter and well worth the price of subscription.”<sup>65</sup>

As editors George Adams and Ralph Christian note, “Newspaper publishing was an unstable business in early Nashville. Between 1800 and 1840, newspapers appeared under more than two dozen mastheads and between 1820 and 1860 there were always four or five papers competing for readers.”<sup>66</sup> The Civil War and Union occupation of the city brought closings and new newspapers as well, including the *Daily Press* and the

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<sup>63</sup> “One Newspaper Less,” *Gazette*, 3 June, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> “A New Banner to the Breeze,” *Ibid*.

<sup>65</sup> “The National Pathfinder,” *Gazette*, 1 January, p. 3. The *Gazette*’s apparent cordiality to competitors suggests grounds for further research about relations among editors and their newspapers in an era in which editors’ political passions not infrequently led to bloodshed (see, for instance, reference to a shoot-out between Nashville editors John Leake Marling of the *Daily Union* and Felix Kirk Zollicoffer of the *Republican Banner* in Davenport, 197. A shoot-out between the two editors of the Lynchburg, Va., *Virginian* and two editors of the Lynchburg *Republican* was reported in the *Gazette*, “Two Editors Shot,” 26 June, p. 2, and amplified a few days later with a reprint from the *Baltimore Sun*, “The Lynchburg, Va., Affray,” *Gazette*, 30 June, p. 2.). That these “affrays” frequently ended with wounds rather than deaths suggests research into whether the pen was not only mightier than the sword but more accurate in these editors’ hands than their firearms.

<sup>66</sup> George Rollie Adams and Ralph Jerry Christian. *Nashville: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, VA: Denning Co., 1988), 26.

*Daily Journal*<sup>67</sup> and a possibly reborn *Daily Union*.<sup>68</sup> Five newspapers were publishing during one part of 1864.<sup>69</sup>

The *Nashville Daily Gazette* was relatively long lived on the Nashville scene but no less subject to the vicissitudes of its competitors. By April 15, 1856, the newspaper's masthead was proclaiming "Largest Circulation in the City"<sup>70</sup> and that claim — never backed up with published circulation figures — would remain atop Page One of the *Gazette* in 1860, under the proprietorship of James T. Bell & Co.<sup>71</sup> However, the 1860 masthead's circulation boast finds support in the paper's other masthead claim as the city's "Official Journal,"<sup>72</sup> in which municipal legal advertising would appear from time to time.<sup>73</sup> Adams and Christian point out that "James T. Bell's *Nashville Daily Gazette* was the third newspaper to bear that name. Established in 1844, it went through fourteen changes of ownership before ceasing publication during the Civil War."<sup>74</sup>

Although he appears only occasionally in the secondary literature, the references suggest Bell held an important but somewhat ambiguous position in Nashville civic life.

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<sup>67</sup> Walter T. Durham, *Reluctant Partners: Nashville and the Union, July 1, 1863, to June 30, 1865* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1987), 66.

<sup>68</sup> Publication of the *Daily Union* on April 13, 1862 has been called the "birth" of that newspaper without accounting for the reference to a newspaper by that name in 1852. Walter T. Durham, *Nashville: The Occupied City. The First Seventeen Months - February 16, 1862, to June 30, 1863* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1985), 75.

<sup>69</sup> Durham, *Reluctant Partners*, 171.

<sup>70</sup> Egerton, 106.

<sup>71</sup> *Gazette*, 1 January, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> An example is the list of addressees of letters not picked up from the Nashville Post Office, appearing 1 June, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Adams and Christian, 26.

Historian Walter Durham reports that in 1862 Bell, an alderman, was among city officials dismissed by military Governor Andrew Johnson for disloyalty to the Union.<sup>75</sup> On April 15, 1862, Bell, described by this time as former editor of the *Gazette*, and *Banner* editor E.E. Jones were jailed by Johnson for treasonable conduct.<sup>76</sup> Bell is identified as owner and editor of the *Gazette* in 1860,<sup>77</sup> and the *Gazette* is mentioned as publishing at least as late as December 1861.<sup>78</sup> However, the *Gazette* was seized under the Confiscation Act early in the occupation years<sup>79</sup> and would resume publication, “James T. Bell & Co., editors and proprietors ... on November 10, [1863] after a long hiatus.”<sup>80</sup> In the interim, Bell apparently became editor of the new *Daily Journal*, “another Union newspaper in the city.”<sup>81</sup> That Bell could edit pro-Union and secessionist papers in such a short span of years raises interesting questions about the man, but the *Gazette* apparently remained a thorn in the Union side. Early in July 1864, the provost marshal in Nashville determined that *Gazette* employees were distributing a New York City newspaper supporting the Confederacy. The *Gazette* staff members were warned, “This practice will not be tolerated and a continuance of the same will subject any and all parties engaged in the same to imprisonment and will cause suppression of your paper.”<sup>82</sup> In the end, however,

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<sup>75</sup> Durham, *Occupied City*, 73.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>77</sup> *Gazette*, 1 January. Throughout the first six months of 1860, the paper listed Bell as an owner (p. 2) and as local and commercial editor (p. 3).

<sup>78</sup> Durham, *Occupied City*, 95.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>80</sup> Durham, *Reluctant Partners*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

military censorship was only one of the threats to newspapers. Advertisers with nothing to sell stopped advertising, adding to the obstacles to publication, and the *Gazette* ceased publication July 3, 1864,<sup>83</sup> exactly one year after Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 171.