

## Chapter 1

### A “Glut of Occurrences”: Newspapers in Colonial America: 1690-1730

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Disease. Fires. Kidnapping. Murder. Royals. Royals behaving badly. Sex. Suicide. Torture. War. The topics in North America’s first newspaper are fodder for today’s tabloids as well. The news of the day may have shocked readers in 1690, and it surely did the Massachusetts authorities, who shut the Boston paper down after one edition.<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin Harris’ *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick* [sic] may have been short lived,<sup>2</sup> but it birthed in America editorial ideas and practices that can be found all the way to today’s press, print and digital. The paper owed its existence to time and place, although it clearly followed publishing practices found in England and drew

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<sup>1</sup> For claims that *Publick Occurrences* was the first newspaper in colonial North America, see, for instance, Library of Congress, “200. Publick Occurrences both Foreign and Domestick,” Eighteenth-Century American Newspapers in the Library of Congress, Massachusetts, Boston, accessed at <https://www.loc.gov/rr/news/18th/massachusetts.html>; David A. Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers: Primary Documents on Events of the Period* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000); William David Sloan and Julie Hedgepeth Williams, *The Early American Press, 1690-1783* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994); Sheila McIntyre, “‘I Heare It So Variously Reported’: News-Letters, Newspapers, and the Ministerial Network in New England, 1670-1730,” *New England Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (Dec., 1998): 593-614, p. 603; Ralph Frasca, “The Emergence of the American Colonial Press,” *Pennsylvania Legacies* 6, no. 1 (May 2006): 11-15. See also, Charles E. Clark, “The Newspapers of Provincial America,” *Three Hundred Years of the American Newspaper* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1991): pp. 1-2. The essay here accepts *Occurrences* as a newspaper intended to continue in successive editions.

<sup>2</sup> Because periodicity is a criterion usually included for defining what is a newspaper, some scholars do not count the single issue of *Publick Occurrences* as a newspaper. See, for instance, Michael Emery, Edwin Emery, and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996). The authors argue that, “If continuity is ignored, there are even earlier examples of broadsheets and reprints of big news events.” (p. 22). In his history of the press published in 1810, the former printer and editor did not consider *Occurrences* to be the first newspaper, owing to its single edition. See Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Barre, MA: Imprint Society, 1970).

from epistolary traditions of New England clergy and government officials. Within a few decades, newspapers would be found in each of the thirteen colonies, but the spread was surprisingly uneven and drawn out [See Fig. 1.]. *Publick Occurrences* was silenced by government authorities, yet the press it set in motion was instrumental in coalescing beliefs that led to the American Revolution, the founding of the republic, and ideas about a free press that have persisted for more than 300 years. Whatever else can be said about *Publick Occurrences*, it is a study in contradictions yet seminal to the idea of newspapers in America.

This essay seeks to sketch in broad strokes the foundations of newspapers, from the beginning in colonial New England to a period shortly before revolutionary ideas began to form in the eighteenth century. It is intended to demonstrate how, from the beginning, American newspapers both responded to and led their communities, influencing and being influenced by the print culture of their day. Rather than simply a recitation of names and dates, this essay and related sidebars attempt to locate newspapers in their respective environments socially, politically, economically, and technologically.

### **Organizing questions**

To help ground the events of history, it is important to ask a set of basic questions. They include, in this case: Why were the first newspapers published in Boston? Why in New England? Why Benjamin Harris? Why 1690? To what end? And, possibly the most important question academics can ask of their work: So what?

Part of the answer is that by the end of the seventeenth century, Boston was the largest community in the most populous region of the colonies, “the busiest Atlantic port

in North America ... a political capital and hub both of religion and higher learning.”<sup>3</sup> It provided critical mass, not only in whole numbers of potential readers but in elites who had a special interest in reading and sharing news of their region and of Europe, chiefly Great Britain from whence they came. And they communicated with interconnected communities along the North Atlantic coast and inland throughout the region.<sup>4</sup>

As refugees from religious persecution, these early New Englanders had a high interest in the affairs of the mother country and Europe in general. And as settlers in a new, frequently strange, and often dangerous new world for them, it was especially important that they remain in touch with one another.

Furthermore, owing in part to the early colonists’ religious roots, New England had always had relatively high literacy rates and participation in a print culture. Two printers – William Brewster and Edward Winslow – had been among the original colonists on the Mayflower in 1620.<sup>5</sup> In the Massachusetts Bay colony, founded ten years after the Plymouth colony,<sup>6</sup> the townspeople of Boston and environs “were concerned about the education of their children. Having enjoyed educational advantages themselves, they wished to pass on the heritage to succeeding generations.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover:

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<sup>3</sup> Charles E. Clark, “Boston and the Nurturing of Newspapers: Dimensions of the Cradle, 1690-1741,” *New England Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (June 1991): 243-271, at 248. Clark points out that “New York and Philadelphia would soon achieve a similar standing in the imperial world but had not done so yet.”

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Emery, Emery, Roberts, *Press and America*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> The two colonies were merged as the Massachusetts Colony under a royal charter of 1691.

<sup>7</sup> Emery, Emery, Roberts, *Press and America*, 19.

In 1636, six years after the founding of the settlement [Boston], they established Harvard College. The larger towns had “grammar schools,” which prepared boys for Harvard. As part of this educational process, the authorities established the first press in the English colonies in Cambridge in 1638. Its function was to produce the religious texts needed in school and college; its first book was the *Bay Psalm Book* of 1640. A second press was set up not long after. Later, these presses printed cultural material, including the first history of the colony and some poetry.<sup>8</sup>

Although educational opportunities in New England were directed mostly toward boys, some girls, too, attended schools at this time. Reading and writing in colonial New England were taught as separate, consecutive subjects,<sup>9</sup> and through much of the seventeenth century those New England schools that did admit girls generally taught them to read, not write. “Seventeenth-century girls were being educated to be successful homemakers, not job holders,”<sup>10</sup> and writing and sewing were seen as “mutually exclusive occupations for the hands.”<sup>11</sup> They were taught to read so that they could read the Bible to their children. With rare exceptions, communicating by mail or creating literature was neither expected nor encouraged.<sup>12</sup>

Further contributing to the creation of a lively print culture early in the colony’s life was that as dissenters, New Englanders participated by nature in a lively, disputatious

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> E. Jennifer Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Monahan identifies Ann Yale Hopkins, wife of Connecticut governor Edward Hopkins as one of those exceptions, along with Margaret Winthrop, wife of John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. As members of the wealthy elite, they would have received education in writing as well as reading, although John Winthrop criticized his fellow governor for laxness in letting his wife, rather than attend to “her household affairs,” give “herself wholly to reading and writing , and ... [writing] many books.” Quoted in Monaghan, 12.

political life that included religious and secular contention and even uprisings against the crown's appointed administrators. In fact:

Massachusetts in 1690 was on the verge of anarchy. The royal government had been overthrown, and the governor thrown into jail. Under his policies, taxes had become onerous, and now taxpayers revolted. ... Indians, who had renewed hostilities two years earlier, destroyed frontier communities. ... A provisional government, hoping to impress the new English king, had mounted a military expedition against the Indians and their French allies in Canada, but the expedition was going badly. Its revenues depleted, the government was unable to pay soldiers, and they refused to perform their duties. ... Compounding the problem ... publications appeared that were critical of the authorities.<sup>13</sup>

In hindsight, it is easy to see how, in a print culture already defined by publicly circulated letters, broadsides, printed sermons, and other ephemera, newspapers were a logical next step.

### **Seeding newspapers**

If the case for Massachusetts as the seedbed of the colonies' first newspapers is reasonably easy to make, owing to high literacy rates, the privileging of education, contentiousness, religiosity, and population density, among other factors, examining the inaugural dates for the other twelve colonies' newspapers is less clear cut. Counting *Publick Occurrences*, Boston had seen four newspapers before the *American Weekly Mercury* debuted in Philadelphia on December 22, 1719, as the first newspaper published outside Massachusetts, although it was younger than the *Boston Gazette* (December 21, 1719) by only one day.

Examining the table of first newspapers [Figure 1] shows an at times counter-intuitive distribution.

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<sup>13</sup> Sloan and Williams, *Early American Press*, 1.

**Figure 1: First Newspapers in the Colonies<sup>14</sup>**

Colony	Newspaper	First Published
Massachusetts	<i>Publick Occurrences/News-Letter</i> *	Sept. 25, 1690/April 24, 1704
Pennsylvania	<i>American Weekly Mercury</i> **	Dec. 22, 1719
New York	<i>New-York Gazette</i>	Nov. 8, 1725
Maryland	<i>Maryland Gazette</i>	Sept. 6, 1727
South Carolina	<i>South Carolina Gazette</i>	Jan. 8, 1732
Rhode Island	<i>Rhode Island Gazette</i>	Oct. 20, 1732
Virginia	<i>Virginia Gazette</i>	Aug. 6, 1736
North Carolina	<i>North Carolina Gazette</i>	Aug. 9, 1751
Connecticut	<i>Connecticut Gazette</i>	April 12, 1755
New Hampshire	<i>New Hampshire Gazette</i>	Oct. 7, 1756
Georgia	<i>Georgia Gazette</i>	April 7, 1763
New Jersey	<i>New Jersey Gazette</i> ***	Dec. 5, 1777
Delaware	<i>Delaware Gazette</i>	June 14, 1785

\*Depending on whether one accepts Benjamin Harris' *Public Occurrences, Both Forreign and Domestick* as the first newspaper in the colonies or insists on the periodicity of John Campbell's *Boston News-Letter* as the first to meet the criterion to be the first newspaper in the colonies, Boston and the Massachusetts Bay Colony were still home to the colonies' earliest newspapers.<sup>15</sup>

\*\*Andrew Bradford's *American Weekly Mercury* was the fifth newspaper begun in the colonies but the first to be published outside Boston.<sup>16</sup> The *Mercury* would be eclipsed in memory by the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, begun in September 1728 by Samuel Keimer, who within a year sold the newspaper to Benjamin Franklin, who in turn "went on to make it one of the best and most successful examples in America of what became the standard type of provincial newspaper."<sup>17</sup>

\*\*\*Although Isaac Collins' *New Jersey Gazette* is considered the state's first newspaper, Hugh Gaine, proprietor of the *New-York Gazette and the Weekly Mercury*, begun in 1725, moved his newspaper to Newark, NJ, in advance of the British occupation of New York City and published seven issues before returning to New York City. It could be argued that Gaine's newspaper was the first New Jersey newspaper, even if only for a few issues.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Sources: "Eighteenth-Century American Newspapers in the Library of Congress," accessed at ; "History's Newsstand Blog," Timothy Hughes Rare & Early Newspapers, accessed at <http://blog.rarenewspapers.com/>; "The News Media and the Making of America, 1730-1865," American Antiquarian Society, accessed at <https://americanantiquarian.org/earlyamericannewsmedia/about>.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Clark, "The Newspapers of Provincial America."

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Hughes, "Pennsylvania's First Newspapers," *History's Newsstand Blog*, Timothy Hughes Rare & Early Newspapers, accessed at <http://blog.rarenewspapers.com/index.php?s=First+Newspapers+in+Pennsylvania>

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Clark, "Newspapers of Provincial America," 381.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy Hughes, "First Newspapers in New Jersey," *History's Newsstand Blog*, Timothy Hughes Rare & Early Newspapers, accessed at <http://blog.rarenewspapers.com/index.php?s=new+jersey%27s+first+newspaper>.

Based on historian David Hackett Fischer's analysis, Philadelphia is a reasonable second choice for the founding of a newspaper, although why it took so long is complicated. Fischer points to the founding Quakers' complex ideas about reading and the instruments of reading:

[Pennsylvania] was very different from normative attitudes in both Massachusetts and Virginia. The Quakers never shared the obsessive interest in learning which was so strong in Puritan New England. At the same time, they disagreed with the first gentlemen of Virginia, who favored higher learning but feared common literacy. The Quakers reversed these judgments. By and large they favored *literacy* and feared learning but were painfully ambivalent about both attainments.<sup>19</sup>

On the grounds of literacy, population density, or economic base (e.g., agriculture vs. manufacturing), one might expect to see the southern colonies – Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia<sup>20</sup> – among the last to achieve their first newspapers, especially with the Virginia royal governors' antipathy to education *and* presses.<sup>21</sup> In that colony, Fisher says, "The proportion of adults who could read and write ... was significantly lower than in Massachusetts. In the seventeenth century, most adult Virginians (white and black, male and female altogether) were unable to sign their own names."<sup>22</sup>

Another impediment to newspapers in the southern colonies was the agricultural economy that dispersed the population to tracts of land in varying sizes and lessened the

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<sup>19</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 531.

<sup>20</sup> Historians, among others, do not even agree on how to group the colonies. One study lists as southern states Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware (Upper South) and the Carolinas and Georgia (Lower South). Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "American Colonial Incomes, 1650-1774," National Bureau of Economic Research working paper, January 2014, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 347.

<sup>22</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 345.

proportion of the population living in more urban areas. Moreover, a sizeable proportion of this dispersed population was in bondage and forbidden by law access to reading or writing. This, too, should have constrained the growth of newspapers, yet South Carolina, with the important and thriving port city of Charleston, was the fifth colony to have a newspaper; Virginia, the seventh; and North Carolina, the eighth. Countering some of the diffusion of landholders, however, might have been that “literacy was an instrument of wealth and power in this colony,”<sup>23</sup> and newspapers would be the best instruments to unite the elites through offering them a common message at virtually the same time.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of population, trade, and wealth, it is not surprising that New York should be the third colony to produce a newspaper, although it being a quarter of a century or more later is surprising. Fischer notes that the Massachusetts colonies spawned settlements of similar cultures in Connecticut, New Hampshire, southern Maine, eastern Vermont, Long Island, East Jersey, upstate New York, and northern Ohio.<sup>25</sup> What became known as New York City represented other factors, however. The Dutch of New Netherland were, Fischer notes, conservative and, once settled, not given to internal migration.<sup>26</sup> In such communities, everyone would know one another’s business, obviating the need for further mediation. Even when the Dutch governor Peter Stuyvesant

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The importance to association or community in newspapers’ power to put “the same thought at the same time before a thousand readers” was made by Alexis de Tocqueville upon his travels in America in the 1830s. De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, J.P. Mayer, ed., George Lawrence, trans. (New York: Perennial Classics, 2000), 517.

<sup>25</sup> Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 812.

<sup>26</sup> Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 816.

surrendered New Amsterdam to the English on September 8, 1664, it would take years for the British influence to displace Dutch cultural ways.

### **Experimentation**

Historian Charles Clark points out that the earliest Boston newspapers were experiments and diverse in their business plans, content, staffing, and formats,<sup>27</sup> but by 1740, though, the experimentation was over and the standard was set for the newspaper throughout colonial America.

One of the experiments saw the role of publisher evolve.

Later in the life of the colonies and even into the mid-nineteenth century, many newspapers were edited and published by men who had been or were active printers. It became a point of pride to claim to be what they called “a practical printer,” one who had trained in the craft and worked his way up from apprentice, to journeyman, and finally, perhaps, to master or proprietor.<sup>28</sup> Even the famous editor-proprietor of the *New-York Tribune*, Horace Greeley, had set type in his youth at newspapers in Vermont and upstate New York.

As noted above, New England’s print culture was nurtured by the printing press virtually as soon as the Pilgrims stepped off the Mayflower, and the craft in Boston and Cambridge nearby on the Charles River was carried on by successive generations of printing families, especially “the proliferation of Greens and their relatives the Kneelands

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<sup>27</sup> Clark, “Boston and the Nurturing of Newspapers”; Clark, “Newspapers of Provincial America,” 381.

<sup>28</sup> Frank E. Fee Jr., “Breaking Bread, Not Bones: Printers’ Festivals and Professionalism in Antebellum America,” *American Journalism* 30, no. 3 (Aug. 2013): 308-335, at 332.

and Drapers.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Clark says, “By the 1720s, when two Boston printers, James Franklin and Samuel Kneeland, ventured to become newspaper *publishers* (as opposed to printing a newspaper for someone else), the town was not just generously supplied but badly oversupplied with printers.”<sup>30</sup>

And yet, none of Boston’s first newspapers was published by a printer. Although he had been a printer in England and in Boston printed books and some official documents, Benjamin Harris was not the printer of *Publick Occurrences*, the paper was printed by Richard Pierce. Clark points out that “The first three successful newspaper publishers in Boston and the first two in America, were neither printers nor booksellers, nor did they entertain any literary pretensions. They were postmasters. Newspaper publishing was an extension, as they saw it, of their official duties.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Enter the newspaper**

*Publick Occurrences* appeared on September 25, 1690. It would be what modern journalists might call a one-edition wonder; there never was a second issue, although its proprietor, Benjamin Harris said he intended to publish monthly and, “if any Glut of Occurrences happen, oftener.”<sup>32</sup> The reasons for its demise are several and some are echoed in modern times: Its publisher, Benjamin Harris, perhaps emboldened by the

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<sup>29</sup> Clark, “Boston and the Nurturing of Newspapers,” 246.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-248.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-253.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Harris, *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick*, Sept. 25, 1690. Library of Congress, “200. Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick,” Eighteenth-Century American Newspapers in the Library of Congress, Massachusetts, Boston, accessed at <https://www.loc.gov/rr/news/18th/massachusetts.html>. Spelling and punctuation in the original.

political chaos in the colony, badly misjudged the political and business climates when he launched his new venture. Nevertheless, *Public Occurrences* did cement some features of newspaper publishing that prevail to this day:

It looked like a newspaper, it read like a newspaper, and it was intended as a permanent news organ. Harris was a good reporter for his time. His style was concise – “punchy,” the modern editor would call it. The pages included both foreign and local news. . . . Indeed, his “occurrences” covered a multitude of interests.<sup>33</sup>

Although *Occurrences* was without precedent in the British North American colonies, it followed the format of the few newspapers that were being published in Great Britain, including Harris’ own previous papers in London, and in particular the *London Gazette*, a Crown publication that became the model for most of British and American newspapers.<sup>34</sup>

*Occurrences* seems quaint to the modern eye. Its S’s look like lowercase F’s, a syntactical form known as the medial-S or long S and used by English printers for hundreds of years until about 1800.<sup>35</sup> There are no headlines. The writing style seems stiff, though more fluid than some that came later. Its spelling seems based more on phonics than on the few dictionaries in print at that time. And punctuation, particularly comma usage, seems random. Its size was about 6 inches by 10 inches (a folded sheet of paper turned horizontal), as compared with a copy of the *London Gazette* measuring 6 3/8

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<sup>33</sup> Emery, Emery, Roberts, *Press and America*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Clark, “Newspapers of Provincial America,” 369.

<sup>35</sup> Parke Rouse Jr., *The Printer in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg: An Account of His Life & Times & of his Craft*, revised 1958, Thomas K. Ford, ed. (repr. Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1995).

inches by 11 inches.<sup>36</sup> *Occurrences* had three pages of type and one left blank. Historians have speculated whether Harris just ran out of occurrences to publish or that he left the last page blank for readers to write comments and send the paper on to other readers. This was a practice employed for a time by John Campbell's *Boston News-Letter*,<sup>37</sup> the second Boston newspaper and the first to be continuously published in the colonies. The practice had roots in the handwritten news letters that had been exchanged in New England, particularly among the clergy.<sup>38</sup>

### **Products of the presses**

As in England, job printing – pamphlets, broadsides, ballads, sermons, books, and the laws and acts of government – supported the presses throughout the early days and well into the nineteenth century in North America.<sup>39</sup> Even if they did not publish them, printers frequently were booksellers,<sup>40</sup> and sometimes dealt in other commodities. Thomas says that in Boston, Harris “followed Bookselling, and then Coffee-selling, and then Printing.”<sup>41</sup> Shortly after his arrival, Harris opened a coffee house modeled on London's coffee houses, where patrons could read the “latest” newspapers – in America, possibly up to six months after their printing in London – and discuss the news. Both in Boston and later at his shop in Rhode Island, James Franklin also printed “Linens,

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<sup>36</sup> *London Gazette*, October 18-October 22, 1694. Author's collection.

<sup>37</sup> McIntyre, “I Heare It So Variouslly Reported,” 610.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, at 603.

<sup>39</sup> Even well into the twentieth century, some small dailies and most weekly newspapers continued to provide job printing.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, Thomas, *History of Printing in America*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

Calicoes, Silks &c. in good Figures, very lively and durable colours, and without the offensive smell which commonly attends the Linens printed here.”<sup>42</sup> In 1730, besides a large selection of books named in the ad and “other Sorts of Book [sic] too tedious to mention,” Benjamin Franklin advertised in his *Pennsylvania Gazette*, “Slates, Pensils [sic], Ink and Ink Powder, blank Acompt [sic] Books and Pocket Books, Writing Paper of several Sorts, blank Bonds, Indentures, and all other Blanks in Use, with other Stationary Ware. Also very good Chocolate, and coarse and fine Edgings.”<sup>43</sup> Postmaster-publishers also had a variety of sidelines, in part because of their centrality in the community’s communication webs.

In fact, newspapers often seemed simply another, but secondary, revenue stream for printers.<sup>44</sup> Historian Lawrence Wroth suggests that the idea of newspapers and other print products was so new that their value took time to root.<sup>45</sup> “The demand for the press in seventeenth-century America did not arise from a sense of deprivation on the part of the people. They had, indeed, to learn its full uses after its establishment, but the fact that five towns possessed presses at the time [the 1690s] ... shows that they were aware of its

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<sup>42</sup> James Franklin, “Advertisement,” *Boston Gazette*, April 25, 1720. Quoted in Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 110.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin Franklin “Benjamin Franklin, Printer, Is Removed from the House,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Philadelphia, PA, March 29, 1730. Accessible Archives, accessed at <http://www.accessible.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/accessible/docButton?AAWhat=builtPage&AAWhere=THEPENNSYLVANIAGAZETTE.GA1730032903.03374&AABeanName=toc1&AACheck=1.224.1.0.0&ANextPage=/printBuiltPage.jsp>.

<sup>44</sup> See, Sloan and Williams, *Early American Press*, 205.

<sup>45</sup> Carroll and Hannan, among others, point to the challenge to novel technologies and commodities in building clientele until usefulness, importance, and value become accepted in a population. Glenn R. Carroll and Michael T. Hannan, “Density Dependence in the Evolution of Populations of Newspaper Organizations,” *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 4 (August 1989): 524-541. See also, Roger Fidler, *Mediamorphosis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1997).

potentialities and anxious to make use of its obvious conveniences in the life of the community.”<sup>46</sup>

A crude utilitarian theory might suggest population density as a measure of socio-political complexity and the value of newspapers to create the communication necessary for community development. Although it’s unclear what the tipping point is, Boston in 1680 was estimated to have 4,500 people and no newspapers and a decade later a population of 7,000<sup>47</sup> and one, though short-lived, newspaper. By 1704, when the *Boston News-Letter* began publication, Boston’s population was estimated at 6,700<sup>48</sup> and from there on the population of newspapers would likewise rise.

In Philadelphia, the population figures are more sketchy, but estimates of population growth from 4,400 in 1700 to 13,00 in 1749<sup>49</sup> suggest that Philadelphia, too, met the population density criterion to accommodate the *American Weekly Mercury* in 1719. In the early years, New York lagged Boston and Philadelphia in population, but again, the population estimates suggest that a tipping point was reached sometime between 1712, when the population was 5,840, and 1723 when the figure was 7,248, and 1731, 8,622,<sup>50</sup> for the *New-York Gazette* to make its debut in 1725. Taking the average of

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<sup>46</sup> Lawrence C. Wroth, *The Colonial Printer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Charlottesville, VA: Dominion Books, 1964; repr. New York: Dover Publications, 1994), p 13.

<sup>47</sup> “Population in the Colonial and Continental Periods,” United States Census Bureau, 11. Accessed at [www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/00165897ch01.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/00165897ch01.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. The Census Bureau suggests that the drop from 7,000 in 1690 to 6,700 in 1700 might be due to smallpox epidemic, though variations in census methodology likewise could account for a percentage of the disparity.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

each of the three cities' populations and then averaging the averages suggests that 7,000 people forms the approximate level of complexity to enable a newspaper.

Population figures are unavailable for Baltimore, where the *Maryland Gazette* became that colony's first newspaper on September 6, 1727, but given the size of the colony it no doubt fits the theory, especially when parts of northern Virginia are factored in as it's known Virginians advertised and wrote to the *Gazette* rather than their own *Virginia Gazette* in Williamsburg.<sup>51</sup>

Further contributing to the rise in the number of newspapers published in a community is the degree to which its citizens engage in political discussions. As colonies grew more populous and complex, their central governments needed presses to provide official printing. South Carolina actually advertised for a printer to bring its first press to the colony and three were auditioned.<sup>52</sup> Virginia's royal governors may not have been keen to have a newspaper press in the colony, but the royal governor authorized a press to print government documents in 1730.<sup>53</sup>

### **Roots of Occurrences**

History shows that there is little that springs fully formed and without antecedents; newspapers were no exception. *Publick Occurrences* drew from the form of broadsides and news sheets in Europe going back to handwritten news digests emanating

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<sup>51</sup> Roger P. Mellen, "Thomas Jefferson and the Origins of Newspaper Competition in Pre-Revolutionary Virginia," *Journalism History* 35, no. 3 (2009): 151-161, at 153.

<sup>52</sup> Jeffery A. Smith, "Impartiality and Revolutionary Ideology: Editorial Policies of the South-Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775," *Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 4 (November 1983): 511-526, at 573.

<sup>53</sup> Rouse, *Printer in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg*.

from ancient Rome<sup>54</sup> and again in the fifteenth century,<sup>55</sup> not to mention letter-writing networks in the American colonies.<sup>56</sup> The venerable colonial printer and historian Isaiah Thomas observed in his *History of Printing In America*, first published in 1810, that the word *gazette*, used in the names of many newspapers over the years, owes its origin to a Venetian coin, called a *gazetta*, that was the purchase price of a newspaper printed in that city during the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>57</sup> In time, the prices described and named the product. After Boston and Philadelphia, the first newspaper published in each of the other eleven colonies was called a *Gazette*, a term that also may have been associated with their being the official government printer. In Virginia, moreover, the first *two* newspapers – published in competition with each other – were *both* called the *Virginia Gazette*.<sup>58</sup>

*Occurrences* and its successor newspapers also were an extension of news networks maintained in correspondence among the New England clergy and other elites that, though transmitted by letter rather than newspaper, produced very similar results and that had existed for decades before Harris came out with *Occurrences*.

### **Benjamin Harris**

Harris was a printer when he arrived in Boston from London in 1686 with what Clark calls an “already well-established career in illegal journalism”<sup>59</sup> and, four years

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<sup>54</sup> Mitchell Stephens, *A History of News* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1997), p.55.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write*.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 138.

<sup>58</sup> Mellen, “Thomas Jefferson.”

<sup>59</sup> Clark, “Boston and the Nurturing of Newspapers,” 250.

after *Occurrences* was suppressed, he returned to England. According to Isaiah Thomas, writing some one hundred and twenty years after *Publick Occurrences* appeared, Harris' principal work in Boston was in book printing and sales. If his relations with the colonial government became fraught over *Occurrences*, he also had printed legal work, including – in 1692 – *The Acts and Laws of Massachusetts*, “to which the charter was prefixed,” Thomas says. “The imprint is, ‘Boston: Printed by Benjamin Harris, Printer to his Excellency the Governour and Council.’ The commission from Governor Phips, to print them, is published opposite to the title page of the volume.”<sup>60</sup> It seems clear that Harris knew the regulations pertaining to printers, yet he went ahead and published his newspaper in violation of the law. And yet, in a community well stocked with printers, he managed to stay on reasonably good terms with the authorities even after they suppressed his newspaper, a relationship historians have yet to explore.

Moreover, Thomas recounts that Harris had run into trouble with the authorities in London before removing to North America. Harris had once been fined five pounds for his printing activities, although the transgression is not identified, nor was it another time when he was ordered placed in the pillory, where his wife shielded him from the mob. Soon after that, he traveled to Boston.<sup>61</sup>

Harris' problems reflected the volatile politics of the period. He was a staunch Whig, Protestant, and pugnacious in a climate that saw the crown and government switch from Catholic and Catholic-leaning to Protestant and back again. Moreover, Harris was

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 89.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

an Anabaptist, a sect that placed authority with the individual rather than the church, putting him at odds not only with Catholics but also the Church of England.<sup>62</sup> When his printed tracts got him in trouble with authorities in London, and when he sailed to Boston in 1686, he entered a similar seething milieu described as a colony “on the verge of anarchy.”<sup>63</sup> Harris quickly joined a faction that included the celebrated clergyman Cotton Mather and opposed the royal governor and some of the leading members of the governing council.

Sloan and Williams say that as Harris had printed material for Cotton Mather, Mather assisted him in compiling material for publication and was instrumental in Harris’ *Publick Occurrences*. They say Harris’ purposes in publishing the newspaper were severalfold:

One was simply that he had experience at publishing newspapers. He had been among England’s most energetic journalists, and *Publick Occurrences* offered an opportunity both to pursue the trade he knew so well and to expand his Boston printing and publishing business. His primary purpose, though, was to provide a medium that the public could rely on for accurate information amidst chaotic conditions. He also intended to use the paper to speak out on issues.<sup>64</sup>

A reasonable but not always reliable declaration of a publisher’s intentions can be found in the prospectus that usually accompanied at least a newspaper’s first issue or two. In his, Harris asserted that “It is designed, that the Countrey [sic] shall be furnished once

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<sup>62</sup> Sloan and Williams, *Early American Press*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

a moneth [sic] (or if any Glut of Occurrences happen, oftener,) with an Account of such considerable things as have arrived unto our Notice.”<sup>65</sup>

Harris stressed that his paper was intended to set matters of public interest straight. He hoped :

*That some thing [sic] may be done towards the Curing, or at least the Charming of that Spirit of Lying, which prevails amongst us, wherefor nothing shall be entered, but what we have reason to believe is true, repairing to the best fountains for our Information. And when there appears any material mistake in any thing [sic] that is collected, it shall be corrected in the next.*

*Moreover, the Publisher of these Occurrences is willing to engage, that whereas, there are many False Reports, maliciously made, and spread among us, if any well-minded person will be at the pains to trace any such false Report so far as to find out and Convict the First Raiser of it, he will in this Paper (unless just advice is given to [sic] the contrary) expose the Name of such person as A malicious Raiser of the false Report. It is suppos'd that none will dislike this Proposal but such as intend to be guilty of a villainous Crime.*

Harris' *Occurrences* differed from its earliest successors of the next century in that he included considerable local and regional news in its columns. Indeed, the very first news item informed readers that:

“The Christianized Indians in some parts of *Plimoth*, have newly appointed a day of Thanksgiving to God for his Mercy in supplying their extreme and pinching Necessities under their late want of Corn, & for His giving them now a prospect of a very *Comfortable Harvest*. Their example may be worth noting.”<sup>66</sup>

He did not, however, name the day of Thanksgiving. And following custom that would last into the nineteenth century, he likewise did not identify a source for any of his news items.

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<sup>65</sup> Harris, *Publick Occurrences*.

<sup>66</sup> “The Christianized Indians,” *Public Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick*, Boston, Sept. 25, 1690. I have used the Hathi Trust Digital Library reproduction accessed at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=dul1.ark:/13960/t7bs1p444&view=1up&seq=1>.

“Epidemical Fevers and Agues” were in the news, including smallpox in Boston; as were a suicide – “a Tragical Accident” – in nearby Watertown; and fires in Boston, one of which consumed “the best furnished PRINTING-PRESS [he did not say whose], of those few that we know of in *America* ... a loss not presently to be repaired”;<sup>67</sup> and war with the French at home and abroad, along with other war news from the Caribbean and Europe.

Only at the bottom of the first column on the second page did Harris begin the longest – and to his readers, possibly the most important – news item of the paper, offering that “The chief discourse of this month has been about the affairs of the Western Expedition against *Canada*.”<sup>68</sup>

Harris’ report told how a New York colonial army’s expedition against French Canada was scuttled when their Iroquois allies failed to support the campaign, sending “their Excuses, pretending that the Small-pox was among them, and some other Trifles.” The report went on to say that a group of Maquas (Mohawks) sent out to harass the French “returned with some success, having slain several of the French, and brought home several Prisoners whom they used in a manner too barbarous for any English to approve.”

He added that “if Almighty God will have Canada to be subdued without the alliance of those miserable Savages, in whom we have too much confided, we shall be

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., “Disaster By Fire.”

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., “The Chief Discourse of This Month.” Italics in original.

glad, that there will be no Sacrifice offered up to the Devil, upon this occasion; God alone will have all the Glory.”

In another item relating to England’s war with France, Harris offered the salacious:

[The king of] France is in much trouble (and fear not only with us but also with his Son, who has revolted against him lately, and has great reason,) if reports be true, that the *Father used to lie with the Sons wife*. He has got all the Hugonots, and all the dissatisfied Papists, with the great force of the D. of *Lorrain*, and are now against him, resolving to depose him of his life and Kingdom.<sup>69</sup>

In explaining the difference between Harris’ content and that of later newspapers, Clark theorizes that:

*Publick Occurrences* ... had a different underlying purpose than its eighteenth-century successors, which, during at least the first several decades of their history, were designed primarily to involve their American readership in the affairs of Europe. Harris intended primarily to save Bostonians during an exceptionally critical time from rumors and “False Reports” of the events and affairs, especially martial affairs, of their own province.<sup>70</sup>

### **The end of *Occurrences***

The colonial government promptly suppressed the newspaper and demanded that copies of the publication, a “pamphlet,” it was called, be surrendered. Without specifying what they found objectionable, the government order asserted that the governor and council found the paper “contained Reflections of a very high nature: As [sic] also sundry doubtful and uncertain reports.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Harris, *Public Occurrences*. Spelling, punctuation, and italics in original.

<sup>70</sup> Clark, “Newspapers of Provincial America,” 374.

<sup>71</sup> Massachusetts Governor (Bradstreet, Simon, 1689-1692), “By the Governour & Council. Whereas some have lately presumed to Print and Disperse a Pamphlet, Entitled,[sic] Publick Occurrences,” *The News Media and the Making of America, 1730-1865*, accessed at <https://americanantiquarian.org/earlyamericannewsmedia/items/show/31>. Given the typographical errors in

Scholars have advanced different interpretations of what enflamed the government. “Most often cited,” Clark says, “is Harris’ criticisms on the inside pages of the Iroquois Indians, ostensibly allies of the English against the French. . . . The officials also may have been offended by a report Harris published that part of the reason for domestic unrest in France stemmed from the dauphin’s resentment that Louis XIV ‘*used to lie with the Sons Wife*’.”<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, the governor and council may simply have been responding to the threat, as the authorities up and down the Atlantic seaboard saw it, of an unfettered and uncontrolled press. Harris did not seek – or have – the government’s permission to publish his newspaper; none of its contents had been vetted. For all intents and purposes, if it allowed the paper to continue, the government would have no control of its contents. Fischer identifies a fear among English elites that a press and an educated underclass would upend their power and privilege. “This attitude was carried to Virginia by ‘distressed Royalists’ in the mid-seventeenth century,” he says, “and became a persistent part of Chesapeake culture for many generations.”<sup>73</sup>

### ***Publick Occurrences and Licensure***

In shutting *Occurrences*, the government took a step that would influence newspapers for more than half a century. Borrowing from the press laws of England, the governor’s council issued its order “strictly forbidding any person or persons for the

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the order and the relatively typo-free columns in *Occurrences*, it seems likely Harris’ printer, Richard Pierce, was a better compositor than the government’s printer, Bartholomew Green.

<sup>72</sup> Clark, “Newspapers of Provincial America,” 375. Italics in the original.

<sup>73</sup> Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 348.

future to Set forth any thing [sic] in Print without License first obtained from those that are or shall be appointed by the government to grant the same.”<sup>74</sup>

It was the application of a principle that had been part of English law during the seventeenth century that, as stated by a jurist in a 1680 case, “no person whatsoever could expose to the public knowledge anything that concerned the affairs of the public, without license from the king.”<sup>75</sup>

Even when such laws were allowed to lapse in England in 1695,<sup>76</sup> colonial authorities employed them from time to time into the mid-eighteenth century. Perhaps the most famous colonial-era press trial involved the New York governor’s attempt to suppress Peter Zenger’s *New-York Weekly Journal* in 1734-1735, but the notion that newspapers existed only by government approval lasted well into the Early Republic, surfacing most notably with the Sedition Act of 1798.

### **John Campbell and the *Boston News-Letter***

New products take time to catch on. Perhaps it was an indication that a newspaper was so novel that there was no great demand for one, it would be nearly fifteen years before the next one appeared, again in Boston. The weekly *Boston News-Letter* would be the first successful newspaper in the colonies and it would change communication styles

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<sup>74</sup> “By the Governour & Council. Whereas some have lately presumed to Print and Disperse a Pamphlet, Entitled, [sic] Publick Occurrences,” *The News Media and the Making of America, 1730-1865*, American Antiquarian Society. Accessed at <https://americanantiquarian.org/earlyamericannewsmedia/files/original/42b5af4fc8d6d987aececeee83f25157.jpg>.

<sup>75</sup> Philip A. Hamburger, “The Development of the Law of Seditious Libel and the Control of the Press,” 37 STAN. L. REV. 661 (1985), 688. Accessed at: [https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/faculty\\_scholarship/656](https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/faculty_scholarship/656).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

throughout the region.<sup>77</sup> It differed from *Occurrences* in several ways, the most significant being three words that appeared on the newspaper's nameplate: "Published by Authority." This time, the publisher was a man who could work with the government. Indeed, John Campbell worked *for* the government, becoming postmaster in Boston in 1702 and beginning publication of the *Boston News-Letter* on April 24, 1704.

### **"By Authority"**

All of the first printers were on the side of the government. It was a matter of power and of economic survival. As historian Lawrence Wroth points out:

It was essential to the well-being of the printers who first took up their occupation in the several colonies that they be government men, or at least, men not inimical to the government. They might count upon a certain amount of profit from job work, newspapers, sermons, and occasional literary pieces of a more ambitious character, but the contract to print the assembly business with its definite task and definite remuneration provide a certainty of maintenance that they recognized as the essential element of their success.<sup>78</sup>

Such dependence also created a form of control. Fearing for his livelihood, a colonial printer would think twice before offending the government that paid his bills.

The brief line at the masthead of each paper, "By Authority," signified a form of control – either directly by government laws and pressure or indirectly by self-censorship by the editors and publishers who nevertheless frequently railed against the restrictions and spoke up for freedom of the press. Early in press history of England, the authorities followed a hands-off policy toward the press.<sup>79</sup> But as the realization sank in that a free

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<sup>77</sup> McIntyre, "I Heare It So Variously Reported."

<sup>78</sup> Wroth, *Colonial Printer*, 13.

<sup>79</sup> Stephens, *History of News*, 78.

press might speak out or could be manipulated against them, Crown controls followed. A series of laws followed, including the creation of a royal censor to monitor the press, a requirement for licensing the press, a ceiling on the number of printers who could be licensed,<sup>80</sup> even what cities could legally house a press, namely London, the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and the city of York.<sup>81</sup>

Although the Licensing Act of 1662 expired in 1695, “the governors of the royal colony of Virginia felt empowered to refuse permission for the establishment of printing until the year 1690, after which printers were governed by royal instructions which required a license and permission from the governor as a prerequisite to setting up shop.”<sup>82</sup>

### **What’s In a Name**

The name of the *Boston News-Letter* reflects its roots in the print culture of colonies, and in fact the print *News-Letter* followed a handwritten version Campbell had circulated previously. Prior to that, networks of correspondents – in religious New England, often clergy, but also postmasters and other, secular elites – circulated news of their communities among likeminded readers who actively participated in communication networks that spread the news of the day. Historian Sheila McIntyre shows how these correspondents evolved and functioned as reporters and editors and how their efforts were assumed by Campbell and later newspaper proprietors:

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>81</sup> Rouse, *Printer in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg*, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

Except for broadsides, certain other targeted printed works, and formal, hand-copied news-letters, before the newspaper's arrival in 1704, face-to-face communication and personal letters were the most effective means of diffusing information. New England ministers were logical transmitters, for they often exchanged letters with colleagues settled in the hinterlands or overseas.<sup>83</sup>

Even at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, most New Englanders lived in communities small enough that everyone would know just about everyone else's business. News of sickness, crop failures, bountiful harvests, births, deaths would travel word-of-mouth at speed newspapers never would match, even the age of the Internet. Indeed, many residents would have participated in the news in some way, birthing a baby, bringing in crops, building a barn, drilling with the militia. What need, then, of a print newspaper?

Nevertheless, the earliest publishers did write about such events amid all the stale news from overseas. Harris reported on smallpox in the town and conflagration. Campbell told his readers – who surely would have known – that “Tuesday last we had a North East Storm of Wind, Rain, Sleet and Snow.”<sup>84</sup> Colonial printers were learning the importance of validating the experiences of their readers.

### **Appearance and Content**

The *News-Letter* was similar in appearance to *Occurrences* – and the *London Gazette* – and its intelligences drew heavily on the London papers' news of the monarchy, overseas wars, and other adventures. But its content reported colonial government news – often reports of government acts and official proclamations – and on commerce, chiefly shipping news that encompassed sailings and arrivals of merchant and

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<sup>83</sup> McIntyre, “I Heare It So Variously Reported,” 595.

<sup>84</sup> “Tuesday Last,” *Boston News-Letter*, February 23, 1719.

Royal Navy ships, privateers, and pirates. One notable story from Virginia told of the death of the pirate Edward Teach, otherwise known as Blackbeard.<sup>85</sup> The report recounted how Robert Maynard, a British Navy lieutenant, and his men boarded Blackbeard's ship along the North Carolina and "fought it out, hand to hand, with Pistol and Sword" in an "Engagement ... very desperate and bloody on both sides." It concluded with the Maynard sailing back to Virginia, "carrying with him Teach's Head which he cut off, in order to get the Reward granted by said Colony."

What today we might call datelines (usually without dates) highlighted all European capitals and major cities. Some reports were relatively complete, others – (In its entirety, "The *Venetians* make Vast Preparations for War."<sup>86</sup>) – were slight of context or detail.

Items such as weekly arrivals and departures give a glimpse of Boston's busy port and the reach of the colony's commerce:

Boston, Entered Outward bound, *Ruggles* for Barbadoes, *Coffin* for *Antigua*, and *Thomas* for *Suranam*[.] Coasters Outwards, *Jackson* for *Piscataqua*, *Newenbusten*, *Tiller* and *Phoenix* for *New-York*. Forreign Inwards, *Smith* and *Alcock* from Barbadoes, *Green* from *Newfoundland*, *Cally* from *Fyall* [Fayal Island, Azores], and *Moor* from *Lisbon*. Outwards Cleared, *Bridgar* for *Antigua*, *Watson*, *Perkins*, and *Eyre* for *Barbadoes*, *David Mason* for London ...<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> "Boston. By Letters of the 17<sup>th</sup> of December," *Boston News-Letter*, February 23, 1719.

<sup>86</sup> "Hague, Sept. 30." *Boston News-Letter*, March 19, 1705. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*. Accessed at <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1036CD221971FE08%40EANX-105662C66B080C58%402343876-105662C684309519%401-105662C6E07965E8>. Such reports of inbound and outbound vessels were common in the more generally focused *Boston Gazette* and *New-England Courant* as well.

<sup>87</sup> "Shipping News." *Boston News-Letter*, October 9, 1704. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*. Accessed at <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1036CD221971FE08%40EANX-105662C66B080C58%402343876-105662C684309519%401-105662C6E07965E8>

Clark says that

By the standards of almost all of Campbell's eventual competitors and successors, the *News-Letter* was prosaic and dull. His intent, clearly, was to add modestly to the profits of the post office by enabling a small cadre of readers in Boston and elsewhere – his circulation by his own account, amounted to about 250 copies at first – to share the public information from Europe that up to then had been available only to the privileged few who could afford a London newspaper subscription, had private correspondents in England, or who were members of select circles (such as the governor's council) that received and discussed such information through official channels.<sup>88</sup>

Campbell's *News-Letter* relied, as did many of its successors, on reprinting news that arrived in newspapers from England and the Continent. As the trans-Atlantic trip in westerly headwinds and possible storms could take anywhere from three or four weeks to three to six months depending on the ship, cargo, weather (especially the fearsome North Atlantic storms driving east), and other factors,<sup>89</sup> by our standards the “freshest intelligences” from England would be rather stale. On June 5, 1704, Campbell's major play spread across the top of Page One recounted the British Navy's losses in a storm that

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[NX-10566231CD30B725%402343715-10566231EC1C91C0%401-10566232460FCB95](https://www.pbs.org/benfranklin/exp_worldly_atlantic.html). The ships were identified by the surnames of their captains.

<sup>88</sup> Clark, “Newspapers of Provincial America,” 377-378.

<sup>89</sup> “Benjamin Franklin: Worldly Ways,” Public Broadcasting Service. Accessed at [https://www.pbs.org/benfranklin/exp\\_worldly\\_atlantic.html](https://www.pbs.org/benfranklin/exp_worldly_atlantic.html); Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004); “How Long Would It Take to Travel from England to the Colonies in the Early 1700s,” StackExchange, accessed at <https://history.stackexchange.com/questions/33596/how-long-would-it-take-to-travel-from-england-to-the-colonies-in-the-early-1700s>; “18th century sailing times between the English Channel and the Coast of America: How long did it take?” National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich, accessed at <https://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/behind-the-scenes/blog/18th-century-sailing-times-between-english-channel-and-coast-america>.

destroyed 14 ships and cost 1,523 lives along the English coast. That account was dated, with no apologies from Campbell, November 30, 1703.<sup>90</sup>

Attesting to Campbell's indifference to linear storytelling, his next week's issue, June 12, seemed to fill in the events leading up to the shipwrecks with a collection of one-paragraph items reporting a "terrible storm of wind" and the toll in ships and crews the morning of November 27, 1703, up and down the English Channel and some distance into the Continent. Publication dates of the items ranged from November 27 to December 10.<sup>91</sup>

Scholars have noted Campbell's paper's heavy reliance on clipping the English newspapers, but in fact he did offer local content, either news Campbell himself gathered and wrote or reports that came to him by virtue of his commission as printer to the colonial government. Sprinkled among the foreign accounts were what clearly were local shipping items that it is believed Campbell himself collected from conversations with captains and seamen on the docks.

One notable local occurrence involved the trial in Boston of pirates who had attacked and murdered Brazilians along that Portuguese colony's coast. The crime was especially abhorrent because the Portuguese were British allies against France. A report on June 5, 1704, occupied essentially a page – half the edition – via proclamations from the royal governor of the Massachusetts Bay and New Hampshire colonies.<sup>92</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup> "A List of Her Majesties Ships," *Boston News-Letter*, June 5, 1704. LLMC Digital. Accessed at <http://www.llmc.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docDisplay5.aspx?set=20711&volume=1704&part=070#>.

<sup>91</sup> *Boston News-Letter*, June 12, 1704.

<sup>92</sup> Joseph Dudley, "A Proclamation," *Boston News-Letter*, June 5, 1704.

coverage consisted of reprinting the proclamations without further reportage, but laid out the defendants, the charges, and other details, along with a call for citizens to turn in any other named suspects and loot that might come from attacking the ships. Although acknowledging that the pirate captain, John Quelch, and most of his officers had been captured and that some had confessed to “diverse Villanous Murders’ and “felony and piracy ... committed upon some of Her Majesties friends and allies,” the proclamation did not indicate the pirates’ fates.

However, the next week’s *News-Letter* followed up the proclamation with what appears to be original, unsourced, reporting:

His Excellency intends to bring forward the Tryal [sic] of *Quelch* and Company now in Custody for Piracy within a few days.

Warrants are issued forth to seize and apprehend Capt. *Larimore*, in the *Larimore* galley, who is said to have Sailed from Cape *Anne* with 9 or 11 Pirates of Capt. *Quelch*’s Company.

There is two more of the Pirates seized this week and in custody, viz. *Benjamin Perkins* and *John Templeton*.<sup>93</sup>

The original reporting continued on June 19 with comparatively extensive coverage, albeit in fits and snatches, of the pursuit and capture of more of Quelch’s band, including those who escaped with Larimore.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> “His Excellency Intends,” *Boston News-Letter*, June 12, 1704. LLMC Digital, accessed at <http://www.llmc.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docDisplay5.aspx?set=20711&volume=1704&part=060>.

<sup>94</sup> “Marblehead, June 9,” *Boston News-Letter*, June 19, 1704. Accessed at <http://www.llmc.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docDisplay5.aspx?set=20711&volume=1704&part=060#>.

The next week, Campbell continued the saga with a report on the trial of most of the defendants, who on June 19 were found guilty and sentenced to death.<sup>95</sup> The saga did not end with the executions, however.

The next week's *News-Letter* advertised imminent publication of a book detailing the trial, including:

The Arraignment: Tryal [sic] and Condemnation of Capt. *John Quelch*, and others of his Company &c. For sundry Piracies, Robberies, and Murder, committed upon the Subjects of the King of *Portugal*, Her Majesties Allie [sic], on the Coast of *Brazil*, &c. Who upon full Evidence were found Guilty, at the Court-House in *Boston*, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1704. With the Arguments of the Queen's Council [sic], and Council for the Prisoners, upon the Act for the more effectual Suppression of Piracy. With an account of the Ages of the several Prisoners, and the Places where they were Born. Sold by *Nich. Boone* near the Old-Church.<sup>96</sup>

The coverage came to a close on July 3 with an account of the execution of Quelch and five of his men and the reprieve at the last minute of a sixth. Campbell wove into the report a quintessentially New England religious theme, saying:

[N]otwithstanding all the great labour and pains taken by the Reverend Ministers of the Town of *Boston*, ever since they were first Seized and brought to Town, both before and since their Tryal and Condemnation, to instruct and admonish, preach and pray for them; yet they led a wicked and vitious [sic] life, so to appearance the dyed [sic] very obdurately and impenitently, hardened in their Sin.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> "Boston, June 24," *Boston News-Letter*, June 26, 1704. Accessed at <http://www.llmc.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docDisplay5.aspx?set=20711&volume=1704&part=060#>.

<sup>96</sup> John Campbell, "Advertisements," *Boston News-Letter*, July 3, 1704. LLMC Digital, accessed at <http://www.llmc.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docDisplay5.aspx?set=20711&volume=1704&part=070#>.

<sup>97</sup> "On Fryday [sic] Was Carried," *Boston News-Letter*, July 3, 1704.