

Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization Newspaper Collection (AC140)

Introduction:

Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization was in circulation from 1857 to 1928. It was the most influential newspaper of the time. Throughout its seven decades of publication, the newspaper depicted various aspects of American life, including the harsh realities of war, coverage of politics, and societal conflicts. It featured a range of content, including news, fiction, essays, and illustrations, particularly political cartoons by Thomas Nast. The newspaper was aimed at a middle and upper-class readership.

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Found in Collection

Title: Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization Newspaper Collection

Date Range: 1859-1890

Size: 2 Linear Feet (1 Box)

Collection Number: AC140

Donor Information: Found in Collection

Citation Note:

Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization Newspaper Collection (AC140), Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri

Related Collections:

AC58: Muhammad Speaks Newspaper Collection

AC78: The Call Newspaper Collection

AC82: KC Star Newspaper Collection

AC89: The Kansas City Globe Newspaper Collection

AC91: East Coast Newspaper Collection

AC94: Kansas City Area Newspaper Collection

AC95: Midwest Newspaper Collection

AC127: The 1934 Kansas City Star Collection

AC141: Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper Collection

Administrative Information:

Reproduction Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Access Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Original Language Statement:

The Black Archives of Mid-America follows the widespread practice of using the language provided by speakers and writers of historical documents. Using the speaker's or writer's language can be very informative and provide pivotal contextual information about cultural and societal customs of previous time periods. As a result, researchers may encounter descriptive language, which often includes verbiage that contains obvious bias, or outdated and stereotypical terminology, and/ or content. Contemporary readers and researchers might find this language harmful or offensive.

Biographical Sketch:

Parents of Harper Brothers – Joseph Henry Harper (1765 – 1847) was a farmer, carpenter, and storekeeper, while Elizabeth Kollyer (1772 – 1845) was the daughter of a Dutch Burgher. Both are buried at Middle Village Methodist Episcopal Churchyard, now known as Community United Methodist Church.

James Harper – James was born on April 13, 1795, in Newton, NY. He partnered with his younger brother, John, to form the publishing company J & J Harper in 1817. In 1844, he was elected as Mayor of New York City, only to be ousted a year later in 1845 due to infighting among city leaders. He returned to manage the family publishing company afterward. James died on March 27, 1869, in New York, NY, and was buried at Green-Wood Cemetery, NY.

John Harper – John was born on January 22, 1797, in Middle Village, New York. He partnered with his older brother, James, to form the publishing company J & J Harper in 1817. John died on April 22, 1875, in New York, NY, and was buried at Green-Wood Cemetery. No further information is available.

Fletcher Harper – Fletcher was born on January 31, 1806, in Newton, NY. In 1825, Fletcher became the head publisher at Harper & Brothers, the family publishing company. Fletcher died on May 29, 1877, in New York, NY. He was buried at Green-Wood Cemetery, NY. No further information is available.

Joseph Wesley Harper – Joseph Wesley was born on December 25, 1801, in Elmhurst, NY. | Wesley also joined his brothers at the family publishing firm, Harper & Brothers, in 1825. Wesley died on February 14, 1870, in New York, NY. He was buried at Green-Wood Cemetery, NY. No further information is available.

All four brothers were buried close together at Green-Wood Cemetery, NY.

Historical Sketch:

Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization was a political newspaper published in New York City from 1857 to 1916. The brothers James and John formed the publishing company J & J Harper in 1817. By 1825, they enlisted their brothers Fletcher and Wesley into the business, changing its name to Harper & Brothers. They drew inspiration from Herbert Ingram's *Illustrated London News*, the first successful illustrated weekly newspaper, founded in 1842. Their first successful publication was Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures* in 1836. Harper & Brothers started another publication called *Harper's Magazine* in 1850, and due to high demand, Fletcher launched *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization* in 1857, an update from the magazine, successfully sustaining weekly editions. *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization* covered both foreign and domestic news, provided extensive reporting on the Civil War, and featured various articles on topics of interest. During the Civil War era, it became the most widely read newspaper in the United States. The newspaper published its final issue on May 13, 1916, and was subsequently absorbed by *The Independent*, which later merged with *The Outlook* in 1928.

Harper's Weekly affiliated newspapers: (Note: not found within collection)

Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures*, 1836

Harper's Magazine, 1850

Harper's Bazaar, 1867

Harper's Wine & Spirits Trade Review, 1878

Scope and Content Note:

Series 1: Unknown Dates

This series presents a compelling collection of undated newspapers. One striking headline proclaims, "No Thanksgiving Dinner for the Johnsing Family," while another boldly insists, "This Ain't Nothing Short of Murder." Accompanying illustrations powerfully chronicle the challenges of cotton field labor and capture the essence of a heartfelt serenade.

Series 2: 1859 – 1867 Newspapers

This series showcases a collection of illustrations from 1859 to 1867. One notable headline stated, "View of the Darlington Courthouse and the Sycamore Tree Where Amy Spain, a Black Slave, Was Hanged by the Citizens of Darlington, South Carolina." Another headline reads, "Rice Culture on the Ogeechee River, Near Savannah, Georgia."

Series 3: 1871 – 1874 Newspapers

This series offers a remarkable collection of newspapers from 1871 to 1874, meticulously chronicling a transformative period in history. Among the standout headlines are "Visit of the Ku Klux Klan" and "Negro Life in the South," each accompanied by powerful illustrations that vividly capture the era's complexities and challenges. This collection is an invaluable resource for understanding the social dynamics of time.

Series 4: 1875 – 1876 Newspapers

This series showcases a significant collection of newspapers from 1875 to 1876. Notable headlines include "Negroes Hiding in the Swamps of Louisiana." This story, accompanied by illustrations, reported on the atrocities in which nearly two hundred enslaved individuals were killed by white men. Another essential headline and powerful illustration titled "Cotton Culture—Covering the Seed."

Series 5: 1877 – 1890 Newspapers

This series offers a captivating collection of newspapers from 1877 to 1890, featuring headlines that reveal the pressing issues of the time. Highlights include “En Route to Kansas—Fleeing Yellow Fever” and “Black Sportsmen in Louisiana,” showcasing the resilience and diversity of experiences during a pivotal era in history.

Collection Inventory:**Series 1: Unknown Dates**

- f. 1 Unknown Dates
 - a. Vol. XXII., No.1382, “A Blackville Serenade,” p.372.
 - b. Vol. XXXI., No. 1600, “In A Cotton Field,” p.592.
 - c. Vol. XXVII., No. 1406, “No Thanksgiving Dinner for the Johnsing Family,” p.768.
 - d. Vol. XXX., No. 1557, “The Village Pest,” p.680.
 - e. Vol. XXVII., No. 1393, “The English Mania for Private Theatricals Invades Blackville,”
 - f. Vol. XXVI., No.1356, “Dis Ain’t Nothin’ Short of Murder, it Aint’t,”

Series 2: 1859 – 1867 Newspapers

- f. 2 1859 – 1867 Newspapers
 - a. January 29, 1859
 - b. November 19, 1859
 - c. April 4, 1863
 - d. September 30, 1865
 - e. May 19, 1866
 - f. June 23, 1866
 - g. December 15, 1866
 - h. January 5, 1867
 - i. November 9, 1867
 - j. March 23, 1867

Series 3: 1871 – 1874 Newspapers

- f. 3 1871 – 1874 Newspapers

- a. December 30, 1871
- b. February 24, 1872
- c. April 6, 1872
- d. May 18, 1872
- e. May 10, 1873
- f. June 14, 1873
- g. January 31, 1874
- h. February 21, 1874
- i. March 14, 1874
- j. June 27, 1874

Series 4: 1875 – 1876 Newspapers

- f. 4 1875 – 1876 Newspapers
 - a. March 6, 1875
 - b. April 24, 1875
 - c. May 29, 1875
 - d. July 17, 1875
 - e. August 1875
 - f. September 25, 1875
 - g. October 30, 1875
 - h. March 18, 1876
 - i. August 12, 1876
 - j. November 4, 1876
 - k. December 30, 1876

Series 5: 1877 – 1890 Newspapers

- f. 5 1877 – 1890 Newspapers
 - a. September 22, 1877
 - b. July 5, 1879
 - c. August 16, 1879
 - d. December 29, 1883

- e. August 21, 1886
- f. September 11, 1886
- g. February 18, 1888
- h. August 2, 1890

Series 6: 1876 - Oversized Newspapers

- f. 6 1876 - Oversized Newspapers
 - a. August 12, 1876, “Declaration of Equality – Justice Five More Wanted,”.
 - b. October 28, 1876, “He Wants A Change Too!”.

Processed by: Kat Miller, Assistant Archivist, May 2025

Sources:

D'Amato, Martina. "The Harper Establishment, or, How a New York Publishing Giant Was Made, Visualizing 19th Century New York." 2022.

“Harper’s Weekly Archives.” 2000. Upenn.edu. 2000.

<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=harpersweekly>.

“Harper’s Weekly | Thomas Nast: Prince of Caricaturists.” n.d.

<https://library.osu.edu/site/thomasnast/harpers-weekly/>.