

From Pen to Press: Women Diversifying Illinois Newspapers

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Lacon Daily Journal, January 23, 1882 “How a woman reads”

“As she finishes each one [newspaper] her countenance brightens with the comfortable reflection that she has outwitted the editor and the whole race of men, for she cherishes a vague belief that newspapers are the enemy of her sex, and editors her chief oppressors. ...she thinks all newspapers miserable failures, but is certain that if she had a chance she could make the only perfect newspaper the world has ever seen.”

For the most part the women’s movement was ignored by the press. When newspapers in the 19th century did address women’s rights and suffrage, it was from the negative perspective. Women realized early on that newspapers could reach greater numbers of people than the conferences and lectures most often attended by wealthy women.



From Chicago, Illinois, Mary Livermore published the women’s right’s paper, the *Agitator*, in 1869. Although recognized by the *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*, the paper was ignored by the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Mary was invited to merge her paper with the *Woman’s Journal* in Boston, Massachusetts. She accepted the offer and continued her career, writing stories and lecturing on equal treatment of women.

American women in the nineteenth-century had been isolated within the woman's sphere, which made the home "their" place. At the dawn of the 20th century newspapers featured articles on home fashion and etiquette to gain female readership.



Alice Edwards and her sister Bessie, published the *Local Record* of Shawneetown, Illinois after the death of their father. With control of the paper, the women dramatically changed the layout and look of the paper. They included pictures, engravings, house plans, and editorials. Alice and Bessie were part of a large family tradition of working in newspapers. For the year of 1906, they carried on their father's paper.

During the mid and late 20th century, a trend of large chain newspaper corporations buying small town newspapers began. Unable to compete, small newspapers were forced to sell. In the 1990s another trend developed. Small towns saw a resurgence of their own local newspapers.



Marajen Stevick Chinigo was publisher of the *News-Gazette* (Champaign, Illinois) a main-stream publication. She served as publisher for 35 years, and fiercely fought to keep the paper independent. Mrs. Chinigo's feminine influence on the paper is seen in her concern of her employees' well-being. She went beyond just the family paper; her businesses included two radio stations, television station, production company, and direct mail service.