

THE
HISTORY OF PRINTING
IN AMERICA,
WITH A
BIOGRAPHY OF PRINTERS

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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SECOND EDITION.

With the Author's Corrections and Additions,

AND A CATALOGUE OF

AMERICAN PUBLICATIONS

PREVIOUS TO THE REVOLUTION OF 1776.

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their subscriptions, and now inform them that, as the *Chronicle* in the present state of affairs cannot be carried on, either for their entertainment or the emolument of the Printers, it will be discontinued for some time."

It was never revived.

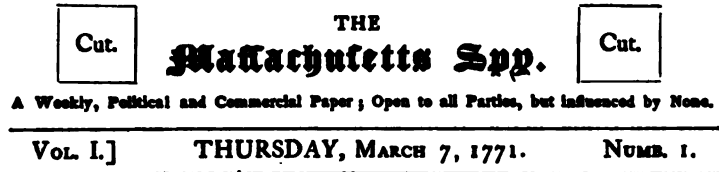
The Massachusetts Spy.

VOL. I.] TUESDAY, August 7, 1770. [NUMB. 2.

Although *The Boston Chronicle* had become unpopular, and the times were deemed unfavorable for publishing a new paper; yet, under inauspicious circumstances, an attempt was made to establish one on a new plan. The *Massachusetts Spy* was calculated to obtain subscriptions from mechanics, and other classes of people who had not much time to spare from business. It was to be published three times a week, viz: on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Twice in the week it was to be printed on a quarter of a sheet, and once on a half sheet. When published in this way, news were conveyed fresh to subscribers, and the contents of a *Spy* might with convenience be read at a leisure moment.

This plan was detailed in the first number, which appeared in July, 1770, and was sent gratis to the inhabitants in all parts of the town. In a short time such a subscription was obtained as to warrant a prosecution of the design, and the publication of the *Spy* commenced with No. 2, August 7, 1770, and was printed in this form for three months by Z. Fowle and I. Thomas; the partnership was then dissolved; and the *Spy* was continued by Thomas.

but published only on Mondays and Thursdays, each number containing half a sheet of large crown, in quarto. In this manner the Spy was issued three months longer. At the expiration of that time, the object of publishing it in this introductory form being obtained, it was set aside to make way for the appearance of a weekly newspaper on a larger sheet than any that had at that time been published in Boston.



Number 1, of this newspaper, was published March 7, 1771, on a whole sheet, royal size, folio, four columns in a page. Massachusetts Spy, was in large German text, engraved on type metal between two cuts; the device of the cut on the left was the Goddess of Liberty sitting near a pedestal, on which was placed a scroll, a part of which, with the word *SPY* on it, lay over on one side of the pedestal, on which the right arm of Liberty rested. The device on the right was, two infants making selections from a basket filled with flowers and bearing this motto: "**THEY CULL THE CHOICEST.**" The imprint, "Boston: Printed and Published by Isaiah Thomas, in Union Street, near the Market, where Advertisements are taken in." The day of publication was Thursday. The majority of the customers for the former Spy preferred the way in which it had been published, and withdrew their subscriptions. On the appearance of this the subscribers did not amount to two hundred, but after the first week they increased daily, and in the course of two years the subscription list was larger

than that of any other newspaper printed in New England.

A number of gentlemen supplied this paper with political essays, which for the time were more particularly calculated for that class of citizens who had composed the great majority of its readers. For a few weeks some communications were furnished by those who were in favor of the royal prerogative, but they were exceeded by the writers on the other side; and the authors and subscribers among the tories denounced and quitted the *Spy*. The publisher then devoted it to the cause of his country, supported by the whigs, under whose banners he had enlisted.

Writers of various classes, in the whig interest, furnished essays, which in a very considerable degree aided in preparing the public mind for events which followed.

Common sense in common language is necessary to influence one class of citizens, as much as learning and elegance of composition are to produce an effect upon another. The cause of America was just, and it was only necessary to state this cause in a clear and impressive manner, to unite the American people in its support.

Several attempts were made by the government of the province to prosecute the printer, but without effect. A piece in No. 87, under the signature of Mucius Scævola, more particularly excited an attempt of this nature, (*see Appendix G*). The printer had the further honor of being exhibited and burnt in effigy by the royalists of North Carolina, and he was threatened with having a coat of tar and feathers by a regiment of British soldiers, which paraded before his house.¹

¹ A soldier in one of the British regiments stationed in Boston, instigated by his officers, inveigled a countryman, one Thomas Ditson, jun., of Billerica, to purchase a musket. When the purchase was made, the officers appeared, and the countryman was taken into custody, under pretence of enticing the soldier to steal and sell the property of the king, &c. The countryman was kept under guard during the night. Before daylight the next morning, after a sham trial in the barracks, he was stripped of his

In October, 1772, the addition of *Thomas's Boston Journal* was made to the title of the Spy; a political motto from Addison's Cato had been previously added.¹

On the 7th of July, 1774, during the operation of the Boston port bill² so called, and just after the landing of four additional regiments of troops, with a train of royal artillery, a new political device appeared in the title of this paper—a snake and a dragon. The dragon represented Great Britain, and the snake the colonies. The snake was divided into nine parts, the head was one part, and under it N. E. as representing New England; the second part N. Y. for New York; the third N. J. for New Jersey; the fourth P. for Pennsylvania; the fifth M. for Maryland; the sixth V. for Virginia; the seventh N. C. for North Carolina; the eighth S. C. for South Carolina; and the ninth part, or tail, for Georgia. The head and tail of the snake were supplied with stings, for defence against the dragon, which appeared furious, and as bent on attacking the snake. Over the several parts of the snake was this motto, in large capitals, "JOIN OR DIE!" This device, which was extended under the whole width of the title of the Spy, appeared in every succeeding paper whilst it was printed

clothes, and coated from head to foot with tar and feathers; the soldiers then bound him in a chair to a truck, and before sunrise he was paraded by a regiment through the streets. The regiment, with the colonel at its head, halted before the Spy office, the music playing the Rogue's March; some of the soldiers vociferating "the printer of the Spy shall be the next to receive this punishment." This riot took place on the 10th of March, 1775. It occasioned great commotion among the citizens, and produced a well written and spirited remonstrance from the town of Billerica to the governor, Gage.

¹ "Do thou, great Liberty, inspire our souls,
And make our Lives in thy possession happy,
Or our Deaths glorious in thy just defence."

² This act of the British government hastened the revolution. It was designed to punish Boston for destroying the tea sent over by the East India company, &c. See the various histories of those times for an account of the pretexts which led the British ministry to lay the port of Boston under an interdict, &c.

in Boston. Its publication ceased in that town on the 6th of April, 1775, and on the 19th of that month hostilities between Great Britain and America commenced. A few days before this event took place, its publisher sent, privately, a press and types to Worcester; and, on the 8d of the following May, the publication of the *Spy* was resumed, and was the first printing done in that town. The title of the paper, of course, was again altered; it was now *The Massachusetts Spy; or, American Oracle of Liberty*; headed with "Americans! Liberty or Death! Join or Die!" The day of publication at Worcester was Wednesday.

✓WORCESTER.

The Massachusetts Spy: Or, American Oracle of Liberty.

The printer of the *Massachusetts Spy*, or *Boston Journal*, was obliged to leave Boston, as has been mentioned, on account of the commencement of hostilities between the colonies and the parent country. He settled in this place, and on the 3d of May, 1775, recommenced the publication of that paper, which he continued until the British troops evacuated Boston, when he leased it for one year to William Stearns and Daniel Bigelow. They adopted another motto: "Undaunted by Tyrants, we will die, or be free." After the first lease expired, the paper was leased for another year to Anthony Haswell, printer. Owing to unskillful workmen, bad ink, wretched paper, and worn down types, the *Spy* appeared in a miserable *deshabillé* during the two years for which it had been leased, and for two years after. At the end of that term, the proprietor returned to Worcester, and resumed its publication, with a new motto: "Unanimity at Home, and Bravery and Perseverance in the Field, will secure the Independence of America."

Good materials of the kinds just mentioned could not be immediately procured, and the *Spy* from necessity was continued under numerous disadvantages until 1781, when it was printed from a good type, on better paper, with new devices and an engraved title. The device on the left was a figure representing America, an Indian holding the cap of Liberty on a staff with the left hand, and in the right a spear, aimed at the British lion, which appeared in the act of attacking her from an opposite shore. Round the device was "LIBERTY DEFENDED FROM TYRANNY." That on the

right was a chain of thirteen links, with a star in each link, representing the union of the thirteen states. This chain was placed in a circular form, leaving an opening for the arms of France, to which the ends of the chain were attached, and which perfected the circle. Above the arms were two hands clasped, and directly over them a sword, with its hilt resting on the clasped hands; the motto, "UNION." The title was thus new modelled, *Thomas's Massachusetts Spy; or the Worcester Gazette*. Motto: "The noble Efforts of a Virtuous, Free and United People, shall extirpate Tyranny, and establish Liberty and Peace."

At the conclusion of the war the *Spy* was enlarged, and each page contained five columns. It was printed from new types; and the motto was changed to "*Noscere res humanas est Hominis*. Knowledge of the world is necessary for every man."

About that time, its editor began to publish, in the paper, as room would permit, Robertson's *History of America*, and completed the whole in about one year.¹ This was followed by a history of the revolutionary war. Besides these, the *Spy* contained valuable, useful, and entertaining extracts, on various subjects, from European and American publications, as well as original essays.²

This paper was printed with continued improvements until March, 1786, when the publication was, on the following account, suspended. The legislature of Massachusetts had in March, 1785, passed an "act, imposing duties on licensed vellum, parchment and paper." This act laid

¹ The English edition of Robertson's *History*, in three volumes, 8vo, then sold for six dollars. The price of the *Spy* was only nine shillings per annum.

² The *Worcester Speculator*, inserted in the *Spy*, in numbers, weekly, was furnished by a society of gentlemen in the county of Worcester. A selection from these numbers, all the composition of the late Reverend Doctor Fluke of Brookfield, together with some other pieces by that gentleman, was afterwards printed in two duodecimo volumes, entitled *The Moral Monitor*.

a duty of two-thirds of a penny on newspapers, and a penny on almanacs, which were to be stamped. The British stamp act of 1765, violently opposed in the colonies, rendered this act so unpopular from its very name, that the legislature was induced to repeal it before it went into operation. But, in the July following, another act was passed, which imposed a duty on all advertisements inserted in the newspapers printed in this commonwealth. This act was thought by the publisher of the *Spy*, and by many others, to lay an improper restraint on the press. He therefore discontinued the *Spy* during the period that this act was in force, which was two years. But he published as a substitute a periodical work, entitled *The Worcester Weekly Magazine*, in octavo.

The restoration of the *Spy* took place in April, 1788, and a motto was at that time introduced from the constitution of Massachusetts, viz : “The Liberty of the Press is essential to the security of freedom.”

In 1801, Thomas resigned the printing and publishing of the *Spy* to his son Isaiah Thomas, Jr. The *Spy* is the oldest newspaper in Massachusetts.¹

In 1785, a neat, small paper, was published semi-weekly in Charlestown, Massachusetts, entitled *The American Recorder and Charlestown Advertiser*. It was printed about three years by Allen & Cushing, and then discontinued. I mention this, because it was the only newspaper issued from a press in the county of Middlesex.

¹ In 1843, there were 79 newspapers published in Massachusetts, and the *Spy*, although it had met with some interruptions, was still recognized as the oldest paper in the state. In 1845, it began to be published daily; and now, in 1872, is one of the most flourishing papers in the country. There are now (1872), about 175 newspapers and other periodicals published in Boston alone.—*M.*