

# Highland and its newspapers

*Post Pioneer-New Paltz Times merger brings end to 121 years of intensely local journalism*

by Ethan P. Jackman, Lloyd Town Historian



*A masthead of The Highland Post.*

This writer contributed one of his first articles to The Highland Mid-Hudson Post almost a decade ago. It told the history of a Highland institution that had just left the village - the Highland Post Office. A framed copy of that article still hangs on the meeting room wall in the Lloyd Town Hall.

Today, we look at another Highland institution that will become history with the publication of this edition - the last edition of Highland's weekly newspaper, which has been published continuously every week for 121 years.

The latter part of the 19th century was a time of excitement and growth in the town of Lloyd. The West Shore Railroad was built along the Hudson River, and there was anticipation of an economic boom because the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge was finally nearing completion. Many entrepreneurs were starting businesses in Highland, including some who thought that there would be an opportunity for publishing a local newspaper.

The Highland Weekly Journal was the first newspaper to be printed in the town of Lloyd. It began publication in January 1874, with Thomas H. Burgess as editor, and it ceased publication in August 1877. Its office and printing press were located in a building that is still standing at 32-36 Vineyard Avenue. This building, which now contains apartments, was originally a much smaller structure. It was purchased in 1866 by William Wilcox, who founded what was to become Highland's largest general store. Wilcox, who was also a carpenter and an undertaker, enlarged the structure, but it still proved to be too small for his growing business, and he relocated his store to the present site of the Ossie Building.

In 1884, a newspaper called The Highland Enterprise was published, but it apparently folded after one month. Another venture was The Highland Tribune, of which only one edition from 1886 is known to exist.

A newspaper publisher in Gardiner had better success than his Highland counterparts. In 1882, Hector Sears started The Gardiner Weekly, the only newspaper that was ever published in the town of Gardiner. Five years later, Sears sold his Gardiner newspaper to Charles Slater, who continued to publish it until 1924. With his sister, Carrie, Sears came to Highland and published the first edition of The Highland Post in November 1887. Sears had rented space for his new venture in the same Wilcox building that The Highland Weekly Journal had occupied a decade earlier, although the Post occupied the main floor, while the Weekly Journal had been printed in the basement. Both Hector and Carrie Sears served as the editors. The subscription rate was \$1.50 per year, and the newspaper prospered.

Plank takes over

In 1924, The Highland Post was sold to Will Plank, who had visions of publishing more than just one local weekly newspaper, and who started The Wallkill Valley World the same year.

Plank also purchased the Poughkeepsie-based weekly Mid-Hudson Post, and in 1937 he consolidated that newspaper with The Highland Post as The Highland Mid-Hudson Post. He used an illustration of the new Mid-Hudson Bridge on his masthead, a feature that remained as part of the paper's logotype through this last edition.

Plank also acquired Milton's two newspapers, The National Pioneer and The Milton Messenger, and in 1928 he consolidated them into The Southern Ulster Pioneer. He also bought The Marlborough Record, which eventually was merged into The Southern Ulster Pioneer. Plank named his newspaper conglomerate the Hudson Valley Press, later incorporated as Hudson Valley Newspapers, Inc. Plank continued to publish his newspapers until 1946, when the business was sold to the Schwartz Printing Co.

Schwartz sold the business to Thomas and Adelaide McKinney in 1951. They continued to operate it for 27 years, and then it was sold to Cecil Brownlow in 1978. Brownlow's tenure did not last very long, and in July 1980 he sold the business to T. Craig McKinney, the son of Thomas and Adelaide. Craig McKinney owned the business until March 1, 2001, when he sold it to Ulster Publishing Co., Inc. of Kingston.

In addition to being editor, McKinney was virtually the only reporter left at the newspaper, although others, including this writer, frequently contributed stories without remuneration. Long-time employees at The Highland Mid-Hudson Post included Mrs. Elizabeth Plank, wife of Will Plank, who continued to work as a columnist until her death in 1984, and Charles Martin, who was there for more than 30 years. After selling the business, McKinney was employed by Ulster Publishing, and continued to write for the paper through this last edition.

During the McKinney family's ownership of the business, technological innovations were changing the way that newspapers had been printed. The method of casting lines of type in lead bars on a Linotype machine, and then printing from them on a letterpress, which had been the standard newspaper production method since the early 20th century, was made obsolete by phototypesetting machines and offset printing presses.

For the newspaper's last years in its Highland office at 108 Vineyard Ave., each edition was set up by producing columns of type on a phototypesetter, and pasting them down on layout sheets that were the same size as the newspaper pages. The sheets were then taken to a newspaper plant in Wappingers Falls, where the pages were put under a camera to make plates, and the papers were printed by offset presses.

#### Hometown flavor

Competition has always been inherent in the newspaper business, and newspapers in Highland were no exception. The Highland Review was published for 12 months in 1931 and 1932. The next newspaper venture in Highland was much more successful, and for 35 years our town had two local weekly newspapers.

The Highland News was started by Harold C. Berean Sr. in 1937. That was the same year that Will Plank changed the name of his Highland paper, and there was some sentiment in the town that Highland's newspaper was losing its local flavor. Berean's newspaper proudly proclaimed on its masthead that it was the only newspaper printed in Highland. Plank's newspaper had an office in town, but it was printed at a large plant in Milton where Plank's other newspapers were also printed.

Berean started printing his newspaper in the building at 7 Milton Ave. (later occupied by Statewide Savings). When his business outgrew that space, he purchased a former car repair

shop at 26 Vineyard Ave., where a "Berean Press" sign may still be seen today. In addition to the newspaper, Berean had a thriving job-printing business, which was continued on a part-time basis by his son, Harold C. Berean Jr., even after the newspaper folded.

Most newspaper publishers are of a particular political persuasion. Will Plank and later the McKinneys were Republicans, and they supported Republican candidates until 1967, when The Highland Post endorsed Democrat Thomas Shay for supervisor. In the 1930s, The Highland Post often lambasted President Franklin D. Roosevelt in its editorials. It was originally the "Republican" newspaper in the town of Lloyd, and The Highland News was the "Democrat" newspaper.

#### A less-favorable environment

For reasons that go far beyond Highland, publishing a local weekly newspaper became less and less profitable over the years. Radio, and then television, developed as effective news and advertising media. Postal regulations allowed low-cost mailing of "advertising only" publications, which could boast 100 percent circulation in an area (although not everyone who received them actually looked at them). Their advertising rates were relatively low, since they did not have the expense of an editorial staff.

The Highland News put out its last regular edition in 1972, even though Lloyd Democrats sometimes used that newspaper's masthead on political advertising material as late as the 1990s. The Highland Mid-Hudson Post and The Southern Ulster Pioneer began to be printed as one newspaper, with only different cover sheets that had the individual mastheads.

An even bigger blow to newspapers came with the advent of the Internet, its comprehensive access to news and the opportunities that it offers to advertisers. It wasn't long after Ulster Publishing bought out Hudson Valley Newspapers that the separate mastheads for the Highland and Marlborough editions were dropped, and the newspaper became The Mid-Hudson Post Pioneer. The sale of Hudson Valley Newspapers to Ulster Publishing also included the New Paltz News, which Ulster Publishing combined with its Huguenot Herald, and called the new paper the New Paltz Times.

The new owner made many changes to The Post Pioneer. Paid reporters and feature writers were hired, old columnists were replaced with new ones, the content was revamped, and graphic designers gave the newspaper a new look. The new style may have been successful for Ulster Publishing in New Paltz and other markets that the company operated in, but it didn't go over that well in Highland, where subscriptions declined.

Color pictures were added to the Post Pioneer after a publisher in Newburgh started a competing newspaper with an office in Milton, which later closed. However, paid circulation plummeted from more than 2,000 copies a week (for the two Highland and Marlborough newspapers) when Ulster Publishing took over, down to 1,020 copies, as shown in the latest circulation statement printed in the Oct. 15, 2008, edition of the Post Pioneer.

Advertisers were also cutting their expenditures back because of economic conditions. Car advertising all but vanished, real estate advertising shrunk with the real estate market, and classified advertising was down by two-thirds from a few years ago. According to the announcement last week, the restyled Post Pioneer had become uneconomical to publish. Its remaining subscribers will receive subscriptions to Ulster Publishing's New Paltz Times, which will begin including some material about Highland, Milton and Marlborough.

Thus ends 121 years of continuous publication for The Highland Post and its successors, The Highland Mid-Hudson Post and the Post Pioneer. Also ending is 179 years of newspaper

history in the town of Marlborough, where The National Pioneer began publication in 1829.

The Town of Lloyd was originally part of the Town of New Paltz. As early as 1833, residents in what was to become Lloyd circulated petitions to secede from New Paltz, and in 1845 the state legislature established the Town of Lloyd. Will Highland now be going back to New Paltz for its news? Time will tell. At least New Paltz is closer to Highland than Newburgh.

---