

*Bluffton News-Banner*

Founded: 1850

Location:

*News-Banner*: 220 West Market Street (1929–75); 125 North Johnson Street (1975–)

*News*: Northeast corner of Marion and Market Streets (1883–93); Arnold Block, east of the courthouse (1893–95); north side of West Market Street (1895–1929)

*Banner*: Studabaker's Brick Block, Bluffton (1856); Gregg & Wiley's Brick Building, corner of Main and Market Streets (1862); Curry's New Building, Main Street (1872); 220 West Market (–1975)

On the eve of the twenty-first century the *Bluffton News-Banner*, a successor to two nineteenth-century journals, was controlled by News Banner Publications, Inc.

Forty-eight employees worked together to create the newspapers and shopping guides that the corporation published, as well as provided offset printing services. Mark Miller served as the president of the company, while James Barbieri edited the journal and was the secretary of the corporation.

Both of the papers that merged in 1929 to form the *News-Banner* can trace their beginnings to the tumultuous era of the 1850s. Samuel G. Upton and Lewis S. Grove created the *Banner* as a Democratic party newspaper in 1850. The paper they published was a seven-column folio that fiercely supported the Union during the first succession crisis. While there was some poetry, most of the paper's pages were filled with serious political news and opinion. The price for a year's subscription dropped during the decade, from \$2.00 in 1851 to \$1.50 five years later. By 1856 Thomas J. McDowell controlled the journal. He included some news of scientific discovery and serials, but the majority of the paper's content continued to be serious political news.

In 1858 Thomas sold the paper to George McDowell. George did not remain in the business long, however, selling out to James G. Smith in April 1859. Smith wanted a

peaceful resolution to the Civil War, even if it meant an independent South. In 1863 the paper was reduced to a two-page publication because of the war and falling circulation. By August 1864 the Banner Printing Company owned the weekly. The paper experienced a rapid flux in ownership after Smith left the enterprise, as D. J. Callen and T. B. Gutelius, J. H. Smith, Theodore Horton and Company, and William J. Craig owned the paper between 1863 and 1870.

In the early 1870s the paper finally found some stability when Craig was joined first by Homer L. Martin and then by E. A. K. Hackett. Hackett became the sole proprietor in 1876, keeping the eight-column weekly until 1881, when he sold it to Homer Martin and Samuel S. Roth. Under Craig and his partners, the paper again included serials of famous books within the pages of each issue, a practice abandoned sometime in the 1860s. They also added a humor column and personal items that dealt with business or health issues, such as who purchased a local business.

A. G. and J. J. Gorrell, with partner E. Y. Sturgis, bought the *Banner* in 1883, and a year later Sturgis bought out the brothers to become the sole owner. In 1891 John Ormsby and P. A. Allen acquired the weekly and started a daily edition entitled the *Evening Banner*. In 1902 the duo sold half of their interest in the firm to George L. Saunders, who eventually gained control of the paper. M. H. Ormsby published the paper for two years beginning in 1910, when Saunders moved to Oklahoma. Saunders repurchased the paper. Eventually he became a state senator and later a state representative. Saunders controlled the journal until 1929, when it was merged with the *Bluffton Evening News*, forming the *News-Banner*; he continued as the editor of the newly merged daily until his death in 1931.

The original Republican party newspaper that would eventually become the *News-Banner* began as the *People's Press* in 1855. John L. Wilson and Michael Karns launched the Whig party paper, selling it to Nelson Kellogg and a Mr. Bixler in 1857. At some point early in its history the journal became aligned with the party of Lincoln. When Kellogg became the postmaster of the town in 1861, he sold the paper to William J. Bright, who changed the title to the *Wells County Union*. Sometime during the Civil War the *Union* suspended its publication due to problems in finding printing type and a drop in circulation. It was quickly resurrected by Cephas Hogg but was almost just as quickly resold to J. H. Smith.

In May 1866 the *Union* was renamed the *Standard* by James Sewell when he acquired the journal. At some point he accepted A. Coltan as a partner. After three years as the publisher, Sewell sold his holdings in the company to Samuel Davenport, who renamed the paper the *Bluffton Chronicle*. In 1873 Davenport was forced to suspend publication. James W. Ruckman revived the journal and edited it until 1877, selling the company to J. F. Pierson. Pierson quickly sold the paper to Charles A. Arnold and his father, George, in 1878. During their tenure the paper was enlarged to a nine-column folio and was "uncompromisingly Republican in politics." In 1888 William T. T. Swaim and Asbury Duglay bought the weekly. After a short time William's brother and law partner, David H. Swaim, became a partner and was made the paper's manager, while the other two partners continued their successful law practice.

In 1888 Swaim and Duglay used a Washington hand press to turn out the *Chronicle*. With a top speed of two to three issues every five minutes, it took a long time to crank out the 1,000 issues needed each week. Luckily, the publishers could save some

time in the setting process by buying “patent” pages from larger newspapers that contained national news and world events, complete with national advertising. By buying these “patent” pages, small newspapers saved the time that would have been required setting the type by hand, since prepressed plates were used in the printing process. But they still left two or three pages of a folio for local material. The popularity of such plates lessened after the widespread use of both the telegraph and the Linotype machine.

After Duglay died in 1891 the Swaim brothers purchased his interest in the business from his estate. In 1893 the duo bought the *Evening News*, the city’s first daily newspaper, for \$100. Harry Tribolet and Frank C. Dailey had launched the paper as a Republican party journal. The Swaim brothers made the *Evening News* the daily edition of the *Chronicle*. The weekly journal continued to survive and was sent to rural customers throughout Wells County until David Swaim stopped printing it in 1918. When William died in 1895 David assumed full control of both newspapers. He later merged the independent daily with the *Banner*.

The first issue of the *News-Banner* hit the streets on 4 November 1929. All of the necessary equipment used at the *News* office was moved to the offices of the *Banner*. Each issue was printed by a 1913 Goss “Comet” Printing Press and set using three Ottmar Mergenthaler Linotype machines. The Goss press, with a capacity of 3,600 pages an hour and eight pages per section, continued to be used until 1975. It cut, counted, folded, and pasted the paper together. From 1929 through 1975 the merged daily remained essentially an eight-page, eight-column newspaper. In 1931, Roger D. Swaim, David’s son, became editor. A basic organization of material continued throughout the

David and Roger Swaim era. Related information was usually placed on the same page, although the material on a given page could vary from day to day. The first page was reserved for national and world events, except for a small column, “News of the Day,” which gave details of local happenings. Bold column headings directed readers to the latest stories, and serials could be found inside the second page. While sports had its own page, society news shared its space with personal items, such as who had visited whom and advice columns. The editor’s opinions remained independent of political party. By 1937 twenty people helped to publish the paper, which had a circulation of 4,400.

When David Swaim died in 1939, Roger became the publisher, remaining in that post until his own death in 1976. Throughout Roger’s tenure as publisher, few changes were made in the paper’s appearance. Serials were dropped from the tabloid by the late 1940s, and a “Looking Backward” column on events from yesteryear appeared, but the basic organization of the journal remained the same. In the 1950s the paper sometimes stretched to fourteen or sixteen pages. Advice columns such as “Dear Abby” and religious instruction by Billy Graham first made their mark in the years after World War II. In 1957 the company bid farewell to Orin O. Craven, an employee for over sixty years and the editor emeritus until his death in 1976. The editors attempted to go to a block paragraph format in the late 1960s but could not perfect the technique until better equipment was purchased in the 1970s.

In 1975 the newspaper moved into new quarters on north Johnson Street. Computerized phototypesetting and an offset printing press replaced the Linotype machines that had employed a “hot metal” method of production. The look of the paper changed somewhat with the perfection of the block paragraph format, but the biggest

difference in the 1970s within the pages of the journal was the change in focus to more local news. Personal items such as attendance at dinner parties and travels out of town continued to be included into the late 1980s, and an opinion page was added at around the same time. In the 1990s sections within the newspaper were sharpened as to content, so that almost all of the news in any given category, like world political events or sports, became contained within a given page. When Roger died in 1976 his widow, Celia M. Swaim, took over the duties of publisher. She sold the company to James C. Barbieri and George B. Witwer in 1986.

Barbieri had worked for the *News-Banner* since 1950 and had been the primary operational officer at the firm since 1964, when Roger Swaim suffered a heart attack. In 1986 Barbieri became the president and editor of the paper, while Witwer served as the vice president and secretary. In that same year the firm upgraded to Apple computers and laser printers in the composition of the newspaper and converted to a six-column format. Two years later the partners bought the *Ossian Journal* and *Sunriser-News*. In 1997 Barbieri stepped down as the president of the firm to concentrate on the editorial duties and became the secretary of the corporation. Mark Miller, the publisher of the *Decatur Daily Democrat* for ten years, was brought in to take over the duties of president, while Witwer became the majority stockholder in the company and, subsequently, the chairman of the board.