

## Citizen Publications

Founded: 1894

Location: West Main Street between Jefferson and Madison Streets (1894– ); 200 East Washington Street (1922, 1953); 601–603 Roosevelt Road, Walkerton (1972); P.O. Box 90, Culver (1973); 107 South Main Street (1993)

The first issue of the *Marmont Herald* hit the streets of the small town that was to eventually be renamed Culver—population 374—in May 1894. For such a small town Marmont had, comparatively speaking, a large paper. It was twenty inches tall, thirteen inches wide, had five full columns, ran eight pages long, and cost \$1.00 for a year's subscription. George E. Nearpass turned out each edition on a Washington handpress in a small, one-story frame building located on the west side of Main Street between Jefferson and Madison Streets. Nearpass did not associate the paper with any particular political party, and in fact politics rarely influenced the paper's content. In 1896 Nearpass changed the name of the publication to the *Culver City Herald* after the town's name was changed to Culver City.

Nearpass was born on a Michigan farm to a Methodist preacher. He ran away at age nine, finding his way to Chicago where he became a newsboy and a bootblack. Within four years he had gained a position as a printer's devil on the *Chicago Times*. At age eighteen he became a stagehand and later an actor. A fencing accident in one of the performances left him without a left eye, forcing him to forego acting. He immediately went to Vermontville, Michigan, and started a paper, which he quickly sold. Throughout his life he continued a pattern of moving to a town, founding a newspaper, and then selling it only to move to yet another city and open another journal. Before moving to Marmont he had developed weeklies in five other cities, including the *Hobart Gazette*.

Nearpass retained control of the weekly for some time, selling to J. H. Koontz in 1903. The business under Nearpass was a family affair, as his son, George III, and his daughter, Myrtle, helped their father run the presses. After selling the venture to Koontz, Nearpass moved to Shipshewana, where he established the *Sun*. By 1905 Koontz could claim to have two thousand readers from around the county. Koontz was active in the life of the town, serving on its first town board and participating in several local lodges. In May 1903 Koontz changed the name of the paper to the *Culver Citizen*.

Under Nearpass and Koontz the journal was issued every Friday and contained a good deal of national and international news. A "Home Gossip" page chronicled the activities of visitors to the small town, told who was moving out of town or into the community, or what new job a person might accept, as well as who came over for Sunday dinner. Nearpass constantly asked people to pay their delinquent subscriptions, sometimes in a column on page one. Koontz called his local summary of national and international news "From the Four Quarters of the Earth."

Arthur B. Holt became the publisher in April 1906, remaining the proprietor until selling the journal to Miles R. Robinson and F. C. Leitnaker in July 1923. Holt was a native of Kankakee, Illinois. He retained the paper's nonpartisan character. Under Holt "Personal Pointers" replaced the "Home Gossip" column, but retained its interest in personal happenings. Holt also added a column on the activities at Culver Military Academy and a section entitled "The Week in Culver," which concerned information on who had taken ill as well as who was moving into or out of town. He shortened the paper to four pages, but expanded the column space from five to six.

Robinson and Leitnaker had been roommates at a college in Kansas, and they were both World War I veterans. They immediately changed the paper back to an eight-page weekly, increased the price of a subscription from \$1.00 per year to \$1.50, and added more organization to the journal's structure. Pictures and serials, along with excerpts from popular books, were added in the 1920s, and a society and local news page was added during their tenure. Visits, weddings, and other personal happenings continued to run in the paper, but they were not as extensive as before. Robinson purchased Leitnaker's share in the business in 1926, continuing as the sole proprietor until March 1949.

In the 1930s the paper remained an eight-page weekly. A large cartoon with political overtones or social commentary appeared on page one. The society and local news column continued to reveal who was about to get married and other personal information. As the town grew, the personal notices that appeared in these columns helped the community to remain intimate. A new column concerning Culver High School related the planned activities and reports of recent adventures and sports news to readers. The "Citizen Bazaar" was an early classifieds section. By the mid-1940s the paper had grown to twelve pages, but column space had shrunk to five columns from seven earlier in the 1930s.

Robinson sold the *Citizen* to Charles Maull, Jr., who owned the paper into the early 1950s before selling it to Chester W. Cleveland, who presided over its pages until his death in 1961. Under Cleveland the journal regularly numbered sixteen pages and was published every Wednesday. The paper's purpose was to serve "the interests of nearly 20 communities in Marshall, Starke, Fulton, and Pulaski Counties." Cleveland

changed the name of the “Citizen Bazaar” to the “Classifieds.” Personal news continued to dominate the paper, and whole columns were devoted to personal happenings from towns across the four counties mentioned previously. As in every decade, advertising space reflected the passions of the time. In one issue in 1953 almost an entire page was devoted to current movies and where one could watch a show.

The 1960s and 1970s proved a tumultuous time both in America and in the history of the ownership of the *Citizen*. After Cleveland died, his son, John A., sold the weekly to Walter L. Thompson, who held onto the paper for only six months before Robert D. Hansen acquired it. Hansen continued as proprietor for three years before selling it to the Independent News Company, which controlled the paper for six years. The Culver Citizens Corporation brought the paper’s plant back to Culver in 1973, only to sell it in 1974 to the Wabash Plain Dealer Company. Three years later the *Citizen* ceased publication. J. David Tranter revived the operation in 1979 and continued to run the weekly for a decade.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the look of the *Citizen* changed slightly. In August 1973 the Culver Citizen Corporation adopted the block format, in which stories are in paragraph style rather than running the length of the page in a single column. The length of the paper varied. In the late 1960s the paper numbered ten pages, but by the early 1970s it had been cut by two pages. While the Independent News Company ran the journal, personal notices, other than weddings and obituaries, were not published. In 1973 the “Locals” column reappeared, only to disappear again before the paper ceased publication.

Tranter sold the renewed publication to Frederick and Judy Karst. They expanded their publication duties in the summer of 1991 to include the *Marshall County Life*, which proved to be short-lived. In May 1998 the Karsts sold the *Citizen to Community Newspapers, Inc.*, a holding company for several area newspapers, including the *Plymouth Pilot* and the *Knox Leader*. Maggie Nixon served as the paper's editor in 1998.