

## Leader Publishing Company

### Founded:

1838 (*Salem Democrat*); 1185 (*Salem Leader*)

### Location:

*Salem Democrat*: DePauw Building, south side of public square, Salem (1838–72); room number 7, Lyon Block, north corner of West Market Street on public square (1872–1920); West Poplar Street (1920–61)

*Salem Leader*: North side of public square, Salem (1885– ); building just north of county jail, South Main Street (ca. 1928); 117–119 Walnut Street (ca. 1930s)

In 1961 Howard Grossman, publisher of the *Salem Leader*, purchased the paper's chief rival, the *Salem Democrat*. After the sale became final, the *Democrat* became the city edition of the weekly, while the *Leader* was published as the county edition. In effect, Grossman created one paper that was published twice weekly under two historical names. In 1985 Rodger Grossman took his father's place as publisher, a position he continued to hold in 1999, and his wife, Carolyn, presided over the firm. On the eve of the twenty-first century, daughter Nancy Grossman Nale was president and general manager of the company, while son Schuyler Grossman was a press operator. The firm employed twenty-six people, expected sales of more than \$1 million, and published both newspapers, offering commercial offset and letterpress services as well.

The oldest of the two journals, the *Democrat*, began in April 1838 when a group of the city's leading Democrats, headed by James Markwell, established the *Washington Republican*. Because the Republican party did not yet exist there was no confusion among the anti-Whig party crowd who supported the newspaper. Sometime in 1838 or 1839 Markwell became the editor of the weekly, while J. O. Walters assumed the position of publisher. Support and direction were lacking, however, and the publication

ceased operation in February 1840. In March the office was sold to James M. Lucas and Calvin Frary. In the fall of 1840 Lucas married and supposedly left the Democratic party, selling his share in the newspaper to Frary, who in turn sold the business to Thomas P. Williams in 1841. Four years later Williams changed the title of the paper to the *People's Advocate*. After Williams's death in October 1845 Frary again regained control of the weekly, changing its name back to the *Republican*. Two years later he again sold his interest in the journal to John I. Morrison and a Mr. Taylor, who renamed the weekly the *Washington Democrat*. Morrison had been a state treasurer and a member of the Indiana Constitutional Convention of 1850.

William Williams and a Mr. Owens bought the pro-Democratic paper in December 1849. Owens sold his interest in the journal in January 1850. At this time the paper was a six-column folio and issued on Fridays. Poetry and political news from around the world mixed on its front page, while political opinion was clearly enunciated on page two. Unusual for a county paper at the time was the fact that the paper did not contain personal notes, such as who had taken a trip or other gossip. In 1852 Horace Heffren became a partner and the paper's coeditor, but he remained with the weekly for only about a year. In March 1854 Zachary S. Garriott became a partner then quickly resold his share to Williams, only to return as editor in 1855. After Williams became county auditor in 1856, Garriott handled the daily affairs. Garriott purchased the business in 1858 and sold it soon afterward to Levi D. Maxwell, who quickly resold the firm to Heffren and Thomas Telle.

Unstable management continued to plague the paper throughout the early 1860s. When Heffren and Telle joined the Union army they sold the weekly to Robert Harrison,

who changed its name to the *Democratic Banner of Liberty* in August 1862. After a tour of duty Heffren returned, and with the help of O. T. Kendall he purchased the paper and gave it its former name, the *Washington Democrat*. George Fultz and William P. Greene acquired the weekly in February 1864. When Fultz bought out his partner the following year, he ushered in almost a decade of stable leadership, but during much of the time he was an absentee publisher. He remained busy running for office and involved in other activities and depended on his editors, Kendall or M. L. Armstrong, to run the paper. The editors changed the publication date to Thursdays and added bolder type to highlight the column headlines, but they continued to devote most of the news space to political items.

Warder W. Stevens and A. A. Cravens purchased the paper in 1872, changing its title to the *Salem Democrat*. Both men had recently graduated from Indiana University and set out to make many changes in the paper. They moved the office from one small room to a larger set of rooms in the Lyon Block. A fire in August 1874 destroyed the newspaper's equipment. That week's issue was quickly printed at the offices of the *New Albany Ledger-Standard*. By the following week Stevens and Cravens had purchased new equipment, and the next issue came out on time. Two years later Stevens purchased the county's first steam-powered press, replacing an old Washington handpress. For a time the offices of the *Democrat* printed the *Indiana Daily Student*, Indiana University's student newspaper, and two religious newspapers, the *Mirror* and *Ancient Landmarks*. Cravens, suffering from ill health, retired and sold his shares to Stevens shortly after the fire. Stevens continued to publish the journal until February 1883, when he sold it to Dr. R. J. Wilson.

Wilson did not run the paper long, however; he sold it to D. A. Jennings in 1886. Jennings, according to several sources, was an intelligent and shrewd businessman, but he enjoyed exposing political and personal scandals, which made him distinctly unpopular. One evening a vigilance committee attacked him and gave him “some rough treatment.” Under Jennings the paper averaged eight pages and was six columns wide. By the 1890s the paper reverted back to its Friday publication date. Jennings employed several devices to increase patronage, including running serials from popular books and issuing nearly five pages of personal notes. Like many Democratic publishers, he printed editorials criticizing the Populist party, an organization many feared would take over the Democratic party. After eleven years as the publisher, Jennings sold the *Democrat* to Eli W. and C. C. Menaugh, who kept the journal until 1908.

Henry E. Smith and Charles R. Morris bought the weekly in December 1908. Smith had worked for the Menaugh brothers for a number of years, starting out as a printer’s devil. Exactly fourteen years after buying the paper, Smith sold his interest in the firm to Morris, who then took his sons, Everett and Victor, as partners. By the early 1920s the eight-column, eight-page paper was being published on Wednesdays, could be purchased for \$1.50 a year, and carried mostly local news items, including a large number of personal notes and reports from social organizations. The politics of the newspaper had mellowed somewhat from the 1890s, especially in months outside the election season. By the early 1940s headlines streamed across the front page, and inside, soldiers’ letters to their parents were reprinted for the whole community. In the mid-1950s the paper continued to concentrate on personal notes and local news, but the price

increased to \$2.50 a year. The Morris family ran the paper until July 1959, when Kenneth and Robert Shanks bought it.

After publishing the paper for two years the Shanks sold it to Howard F. Grossman. The new owner appointed Marvin Morris, the grandson of Charles Morris, as editor. Cecil J. Smith became the editor in 1966, a position he continued to hold in 1999. Personal notices, discarded by most community newspapers by the end of the 1960s, appeared in the pages of the *Democrat* into the late 1980s. The politics of the journal ceased to be overtly partisan after the late 1960s, but syndicated columnists, representing both major political parties, were printed into the late 1970s. As Salem grew, the number of pages per issue did as well, numbering as many as thirty-two in regular issues by 1987. One tradition that has not been abandoned is the inclusion of a “Down Memory Lane” column, which in another form can be traced to the 1940s.

The story of the *Salem Leader* is less complicated than that of its sister publication. James A. Kemp launched the weekly newspaper as a pro-Republican party journal in 1885. The four-column folio featured mostly personal notes and local gossip in a column titled “Home News.” Kemp printed a daily version of the journal during the county fair in 1885, but he did not continue the practice after the fair closed. A year after he founded the *Leader*, Kemp bought the *True-Blue Republican*, his only Republican party rival, and merged the two weeklies to form the *Salem Republican-Leader*. Political news became more prominently displayed in the combined publication, and Kemp added serials and news of world events by the 1890s. He later bought a power press and expanded the size of the journal to be more competitive with his Democratic rivals.

Kemp continued to publish the paper until 1903, when he sold it to James A. Prow and F. A. Martin.

Prow and Martin did not keep control of the weekly for long, selling it to John W. Lewis in 1907. Lewis, a lawyer turned newspaperman, published the *Republican-Leader* for twenty-one years. Under Lewis the paper reported every Friday on news of local interest, but it rarely printed strident political opinions. In 1928 Walter H. Crim acquired the weekly, retaining ownership until his death in 1946. Agnes Crim, Walter's widow, took over the publishing duties. Under the Crims, bold headlines topped each column on the front page, and a year's subscription cost \$1.50. News of world political events mixed with local items, and personal news was reported in the "Locals" or "County Briefs" sections. The editorials rang with Republican party philosophy. By the early 1940s the paper included a women's page, containing a social events calendar and news, personal notes, and wedding announcements, and a syndicated column by Earl Wilson, a Republican congressman. By the end of Walter's tenure, the paper had won several journalistic awards. Agnes added a complete photography department, making the *Republican-Leader* one of the first weekly newspapers in the state to have one.

Howard Grossman purchased the paper in 1949. During Howard's time as editor the paper continued to receive several awards, and he was elected president of the Indiana State Press Association. After he took over, the word "Republican" on the masthead was made much smaller and then completely dropped in 1960. A year later the Grossman family incorporated the business, creating the Leader Publishing Company of Salem, Incorporated, the company that continued to own both the *Leader* and the *Democrat* in 1999. The Grossmans better organized the *Leader*, creating three news sections. They

began covering sports more heavily and increased the number of pages to as many as eighteen. After the late 1960s, when the political intensity of the journal diminished, few distinctions remained between the *Leader* and its sister publication, the *Democrat*.