

*Madison Courier*, Incorporated

Founded: 1837

Location: Second Street, Madison (1837–45); 59 West Street (1845, 1879); 312 West Street, 310 Courier Square (1887, 1888– )

Andrew Gray, a staunch Democrat from nearby Vevay, founded the *Madison Courier* in May 1837 in the small river town with a population of less than 2,000. He began with a George Washington handpress, which took two people to operate, similar to the press used by Johannes Gutenberg. After Gray found that he could not make a profit on the venture he sold the company to Rolla Doolittle and Andrew O'Grady. Within another two years Doolittle became the sole proprietor. In November 1842 Elias Levy merged his newly created Democratic paper, the *Halcyon*, with the *Courier* and the name of the weekly was changed to the *Courier and Constitutional Advocate*. Within a year Doolittle was again the sole publisher and the paper's name reverted to the *Courier*.

President James K. Polk rewarded Doolittle for his faithful service to the Democratic party by appointing him postmaster of Madison in 1845. Doolittle sold the weekly to Samuel F. Covington. During the shift from Doolittle to Covington the *Courier* barely escaped foreclosure. Like most newspapers of the time the *Courier* barely made a profit, if in fact it made one at all. As a result Doolittle found himself in steep financial trouble with creditors ready to go to court to recover their money. By some secret dealing, he arranged to have his suit heard on the last day of the court's session. As expected, the court ordered the plant of the *Courier* sold for the recovery of debts.

In the middle of the night Doolittle and some accomplices knocked out the wall between the *Courier* and the adjoining building and moved the equipment next door, sealing the wall behind them. This action frustrated the wishes of the court to recover the money owed to the

creditors since the judge's order extended only to the previous day's address. Before the court could act again in the next session, Covington owned the paper and the business's debts had mysteriously disappeared.

Covington reportedly made the paper a success. When a cholera epidemic swept the area, however, he decided to leave town, selling the weekly back to Doolittle, who in turn sold the paper to Michael C. Garber. Garber received financial support from Sen. Jesse D. Bright, a prominent and powerful Indiana Democrat. Bright was a good friend of Henry Clay, a supporter of southern nationalism. Bright had previously served as Indiana's lieutenant governor and as a state senator.

Garber was born into a Virginia Quaker family. He moved to Pennsylvania after he turned sixteen to work for his uncle on a stagecoach line. After working at several other jobs he settled in Rising Sun, Indiana, later moving to Madison where he bought the *Courier* in 1849. He left the Democratic party in the mid-1850s after Bright, a strong proponent of slavery, "read" him out of the organization. During the Civil War Bright was expelled from the Senate for sending a letter to Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy.

Garber had grown more vociferous in his attacks against slavery and the fugitive slave law as the 1850s wore on, a move not in step with the southern-sympathizing wing of the party. After being forced out by the Democrats, Garber helped found the Republican party in Indiana, serving as the party's first state chairman and attending its first national convention in 1856. Garber joined the Union army, rose to the rank of colonel, and fought by the side of Gen. William T. Sherman.

Garber brought stability and better equipment to the journal. He purchased a steam-driven Cottrell & Babcock drum-cylinder press shortly before the Civil War. He continued the

daily edition of the *Courier*, begun by Covington on 30 April 1849. When the Civil War erupted he joined the cause and left the paper in the hands of Charles B. Baymiller. After the war his son, Michael C. Garber, Jr., joined the business. After the elder Garber's death in 1881 his son took over the business.

Michael Jr. brought many innovations to the paper. Like his predecessors he tried to keep up and adapt with the changing technology. A year after his father's death he incorporated the paper. In 1893 he replaced the steam boiler with a gas engine and a year later built a two-story addition to the plant. After the turn of the century he purchased a Babcock drum-cylinder press that could produce 3,000 papers in an hour. The turn-of-the-century *Courier* ran six pages in length and was eight columns wide. Every page had a mix of local, regional, and national news.

By 1908 Garber had sold the bookbindery and the job printing departments of the company to reduce costs. At the same time he also bought the company's first Linotype machine. By 1911 the circulation of the paper had reached 2,271. When Garber retired from the paper most of the modern equipment at the paper was the result of his determination to bring current technology to the company. Outside of the newspaper he busied himself with work on the Indiana Ohio Rivers and Harbors Commission and was largely responsible for the development of Clifty Falls State Park.

Michael E. Garber took over after his father's retirement. Like his father he endeavored to keep up with the pace of change and make certain that the *Courier* was second to none. He discontinued the weekly edition of the *Courier* and razed the old office structure to make way for a new building made of Indiana limestone, completed in 1926. He also purchased two additional Linotype machines. After joining the Associated Press wire service Garber purchased new

telegraph typewriters. In the 1920s the paper carried very few pictures and the editors did not seem to be as obsessed as the rest of the nation about the sports craze. Subscribers could expect delivery every day except Sunday and paid \$4.00 a year for the daily.

When the Great Depression struck the town in the early 1930s Garber reduced worker hours to forty-two per week in order to retain his entire staff. The paper continued to run serials and it remained a six-page journal. Four new Linotype machines were ordered in 1939. Only two of the machines reached the offices of the *Courier*, the other half of the order was stopped by the Preparedness Program of the federal government. After World War II ended Garber expanded the newspaper's circulation and editorial staffs, ordered a rotary press, and reached for Kentucky readers not previously sought. Each edition ran at least eight pages in length and did not contain identifiable sections. In the mid- to late 1940s Garber began to slowly turn over control of the daily to his two sons-in-law, Lloyd G. Neal and Donald Wallis.

In the 1950s the length of each issue expanded to ten or twelve pages. The paper continued an old tradition of relating personal news from each small town around Madison. Information concerning marriages was followed by reports of whether a cousin from California or a friend from Columbus was visiting. The editorials remained favorable to the Republican party and a sports section finally emerged. After Garber's death in 1962 Wallis was named publisher. Under Wallis sections of the paper became more regular. National news, concerning such topics as the Vietnam War, continued to mix on the front page with items of local interest. Minute personal information ceased to be printed but weddings, anniversaries, and funerals still made it in the "Social Round-Up" on page five. In 1962 Lloyd G. Neal's son, Michael G., took over the editorial duties from his late father.

By the late 1970s the paper regularly numbered twenty-four pages in length and was split into two sections. Local news dominated the front page, but national and international news could be found in the back pages of the first section. A page devoted to Kentucky and regional interest was placed on the front page of the second section. A decade later the number of pages had slipped to around sixteen, with Section B devoted mostly to sports and classified advertisements. Jane Jacobs, Donald Wallis's daughter, became the president and publisher of the company after her father's death in 1989. She had worked at the paper for sixteen years before becoming the publisher.

By the 1990s the company began to install computer equipment and began the Courier Connection, a twenty-four-hour audio text system that can be accessed from any phone. In 1998 Jane Jacobs retained the title of president of the private corporation. The company had a staff of thirty-three and worked solely in the newspaper printing field, publishing the *Courier* every day except on Sunday and most major holidays. Each edition ran about sixteen pages in length and was sent to its 9,400 customers in Jefferson and Switzerland Counties, Indiana, and two counties in Kentucky. Curt and William Jacobs joined their mother in the 1990s, making them the sixth generation of the family to work at the *Courier*.