

# Bethel's Newspapers—the First 100 Years

The Bethel News  
The Oxford County Citizen  
The Oxford County Bethel Citizen



This important and interesting chapter of Bethel history is a two-part story—the first century of Bethel newspapers followed by the end of letterpress printing

March 1, 2011

Bethel Maine History—The Bethel Journals

## Bethel's newspaper- the first hundred years

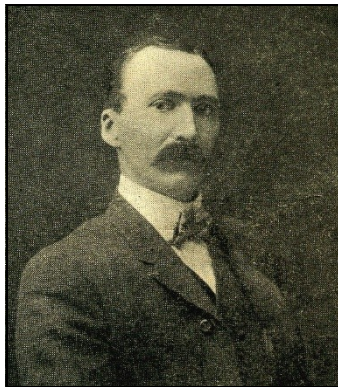
By John K. Brown - Editor emeritus of The Bethel Citizen

The Courier of the 1850s - first published in December 1858 by Cady and Smith; it ceased publication in 1861. A prominent feature of this paper was a series of articles by Dr. N. T. True, who for thirteen years was principal of Gould Academy starting in 1848.



On June 5, 1895 The Bethel News, the predecessor of The Citizen was first published by Aked D. Ellingwood of Milan, N.H., with printing facilities at the rear of the Cole Block. Earlier that year Mr. Ellingwood had established a job printing office in Bethel.

In September of 1897 E. C. Bowler of Palermo acquired half interest in The News, and the following March the remainder of the business. After spending five years in the teaching profession, he came to Bethel prepared to devote his full time and energy to the printing and publishing business. Under Mr. Bowler's astute management the business reportedly doubled the first year.



**Ernest C. Bowler**

About the middle of the first decade of the 20th Century The News acquired its first Linotype, which according to Mr. Bowler, was the first to be installed in a weekly shop. Up until that time the paper had been completely hand set.

It might be of interest to note here that as a young lady, Fanny Carter, the mother of Gus and Dick Carter and Becky Bailey, the late Stanley and Paul Carter, grandmother of Tim, Tom and Edward Carter and mother-in-law of Elizabeth Mason Carter, was employed as a typesetter in The News office.

In 1906 Mr. Bowler opened an office in Rumford and initiated The Rumford Citizen. This paper was operated separately from The News, but both of the publications were printed in the Bethel plant. In the summer of 1908 the papers were combined as The Oxford County Citizen.

When Mr. Bowler moved on in 1913, Fred B. Merrill acquired The Citizen. Later Mr. Bowler became the business manager of Portland's Daily Eastern Argus, which later became the Portland Herald. He remained in that city until The Herald and The Press were consolidated.

Mr. Merrill had been associated with Ellery C. Park and Judge A.E. Herrick in the practice of law and in the management of the Bethel Savings Bank and the Bethel National Bank. (The printing office, law office and banks were all located in the Cole Block.)



**Fred B Merrill**

In November of 1917, The Citizen had acquired a second Linotype. The new machine replaced the one acquired a decade earlier.

In 1920 Mr. Merrill sold the paper to David Forbes of Gorham, N.H., and returned to a position as assistant cashier of the Bethel National Bank. After the local bank's acquisition by the Casco Bank and Trust Company in 1945, he continued as manager of its Bethel branch until the late 1940's.

Mr. Forbes was the brother of Dan Forbes of Bethel and was a member of the staff at The Rumford Falls Times for many years.

Dave Forbes was an uncle of Mrs. Beatrice Lowell of Newry.

In November of 1927 Carl L. Brown acquired The Citizen from David Forbes; Mr. Brown had been employed at the newspaper since 1911 except for a brief stint early on at the Independent Reporter, Skowhegan.

Known as the Oxford County Citizen since the summer of 1908, in the mid – 1930's "Bethel" was added to its name. Early in that decade its format was reduced to a tabloid size, which was continued for about eight years. (Note: "Oxford County" was dropped from the paper's masthead in 1995)



**Carl Brown 1931**

Mr. Brown was editor of The Citizen until his death on April 12, 1963. In 1961 the paper and print shop was incorporated as Citizen Printers, Inc. From 1963 to 1975 Mr. Brown's widow, Ruth, was majority stockholder in Citizen Printers Inc. with sons Don Brown, John Brown, Edwin Brown and Edwin's wife, Musa, participating in the day-to-day operation of the paper. Ruth Brown passed away in March of 1977.

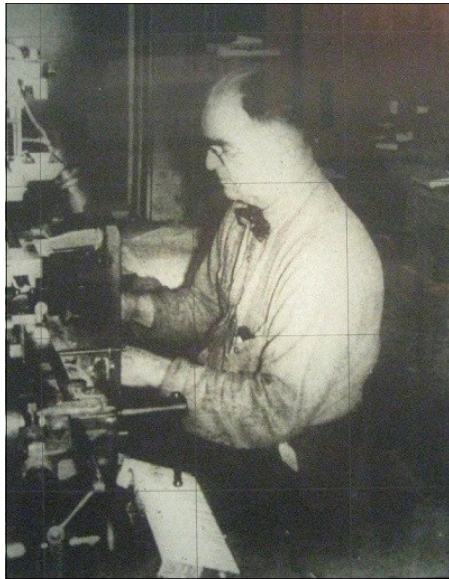
In the fall of 1974 The Citizen purchased another Linotype relegating the 1917 acquisition after 57 years of faithful service to the provision of necessary spare parts.

Earlier in 1964, a Fairchild Engraver that made plastic photo engravings was acquired to enable the use of more photographs in the paper. Prior to having an engraver in the shop, it was necessary to have zinc halftones made in Portland or Lewiston or, as

in the 1950's and early '60s, photographs could be sent by airmail to a plant in Oklahoma on Saturday and plastic engravings received back on Wednesday. Any photos received on Monday or Tuesday had to be sent to Lewiston for zinc engravings if publication was planned for that Thursday.

For a short time after the installation of the Fairchild, the shop furnished engraving for the Norway Advertiser-Democrat.

In November of 1967 The Citizen purchased a 10-x-15 offset press. By 1974 it had been exchanged for a 11-x-17 unit.



**Carl Brown at Model 14 Linotype in the 1950's**

One of my most vivid memories was the Thursday afternoon in August of 1956 when what is believed to be the press that printed the Bethel paper since day one in the Cole Block had its final breakdown. As soon as local machinist Asher Runnels told Dad that the old press was un-repairable, the week's press run was completed on a smaller press two pages at a time. The smaller press was more used to printing town reports, The Gould Blue and Gould, and later in 1958-59 Eva Bean's "East Bethel Road". One of the disadvantages of printing the paper two pages at a time was that it had to be assembled and folded by hand.

As soon as possible Dad began making inquiries as to the availability of a press to replace the corporate heirloom that caused the building to creak and shake every time it went into operation. Bethel's first town manager, O.T. Rozelle, whose office was on the second floor, used to say that he knew when the building stopped shaking that it was time to pick up his paper.

A used printing equipment dealer in Connecticut thought he had a press that would fill the need. But there was a problem, actually three problems: it needed work, it wouldn't be ready for two months, and it was upstairs in a warehouse in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Eventually all of those problems were solved and preparations were completed for it at the shop. Hopes were expressed that it would arrive before "snow flies". Finally the Saturday came in November when the carpenters removed the rear wall of the shop and the heavy equipment movers pulled and twitched and "heaved and ho'd" until the press was in its proper place.

The press was everything the dealer said it was and served faithfully and well for nearly 29 years until it printed its final issue on March 7, 1985. It took considerable ne-



gotiating with the express company to get the cost of transportation to even the neighborhood of the estimated expense.

During World War II, the Citizen made available an “overseas edition” that was mailed to servicemen as a contact with home. In those days before satellites and fax machines and cellular phones, the mail was often the only contact those overseas had with home for months, even years, at a time.

For over 90 years the job print shop of The News and later The Citizen served the printing needs of many in this part of the state and in some cases far beyond.

For 80 years or more the shop printed the annual reports of the towns in this region. In my memory reports were printed for area town including Andover, Bethel, Greenwood, West Paris, Paris, Newry, the Plantations of Magalloway and Lincoln, the New Hampshire towns of Shelburne and Errol, Maine School Administrative District #44



**John Brown operates a linotype machine.** Photo: Russ Dillingham, Lewiston Sun photographer, February 17, 1985

and prior to the mid ‘50s, the Bethel Village Corporation. Until about the middle of the 1930’s the shop also printed the reports of the towns of Albany and Mason.

Until 1940 The Citizen’s plant produced the Academy Herald, the yearbook of Gould Academy. For years, until the early 1930’s, the Herald was published twice each year.

For many years prior to the early 1970’s daily luncheon and dinner menus were printed for the Bethel Inn. Quite possibly the growing prevalence of copying machines along about that time made the in-house printing of the daily menus more economical.

Gordon Lathrop from Massachusetts worked at the shop in the early 1930’s for probably about five or six years. He frequently authored a popular weekly column “The Finger Points”. While in Bethel he married Beulah Burriss of West Bethel. From here he went to Madison, where he was publisher and editor of The Madison Bulletin until 1947. The Citizen purchased the remainder of his inventory of news print that fall. He later was an instructor in a school in Deland, Fla.

Joe Fisette, one of the last of the tramp printers, only in his case a Linotype operator, worked at The Citizen during the winter of 1940-41.

Others who worked in The Citizen print shop at various times in the last 1920’s and early ‘30s included a Mr. Doyle; Russell Rix, who had operated a print shop in Gorham,

N.H.; “Red” Webber, who also played first base for the town team and, Walter Allen an accomplished banjoist who lent his talents to local music makers.

G. Philip Parlin of Dorchester, Mass., came to work at The Citizen in June of 1947. He returned to Massachusetts in the winter of 1950-51.

The Citizen missed two issues as a result of a fire in the winter of 1923, when extensive water damage curtailed publication for two weeks. Loss of electric power during a flood in early March 1936 caused a delay of publication for one week’s issue.

Over the years The Citizen and its predecessor have published four special editions: the first, in 1896, marked the town centennial; no specific reason has ever been un-



**Ed Brown removes plates from old letterpress.** Photo: Russ Dillingham, Lewiston Sun photographer, February 17, 1985

earthed for the second, in 1904; a special edition in 1931 marked the Sesquicentennial of the Last Indian Raid; and in 1974 for the Bicentennial of the First Settlement of Bethel and to Commemorate the Dedication of the Moses Mason Museum.

Stanley Howe has asked how would we describe our father’s approach to the operation of a small town newspaper. We can think of no better thoughts than those of Pearl Ashby Tibbetts, mother of Margaret Joy Tibbetts, as expressed in his obituary nearly a third of a century ago:

“In the 50 years of association with the local newspaper he learned well the colorful history of his country and state. As none other he knew the people and with sincere praise reported all success and achievement, he touched lightly our faults and misfortunes.

“His Oxford County Citizen is unique and outstanding as a weekly. Comments from its pages are often quoted in the

New England press and it is an eagerly awaited messenger of hundreds of away-from Bethel residents and students in the far corners of the world.

”As a printer Carl had no peer. His excellent proofreading shamed other newspapers.”

I would be remiss indeed in this history if I did not mention our brother Edwin, and his wife Musa.

Edwin, without what must have seemed to be endless hours as a Linotype operator and pressman much of this would not have been possible, and Musa, whose full-time duties as bookkeeper, subscription department, proofreader and salesperson extended

## End of an era:

### Bethel paper trades printing past for new technology

By GERALD GOLDSTEIN *Providence Journal*

Lewiston Sun February 17, 1985

BETHEL - Etaoin Shrdlu, 99, who for generations put the news into America's newspapers, can't find much work nowadays. And he's about to lose still another job — this time at the tiny but pungent Downeast weekly here,

Shrdlu is an imaginary character who symbolized the now vanishing craft of hot-type printing. He still toils in the ancient, inky composing room of Oxford County's 2,300 circulation *Bethel Citizen* but he's been pink-slipped, effective next month.

To the crusty old printers here whose trade is being swallowed by computer technology, Shrdlu personified the Linotype machine — a monolithic, clattering contrivance for type-setting that jammed up on a whim and was apt to set its operator a howl by squirting molten lead on his left leg — the one nearest the melting pot.

The machine was invented in 1886 and if you read the typewriter-like keys across part of its keyboard, you see legendary name: E-t-a-o-i-n S-h-r-d-l-u. Over the past 20 years, the machines were abandoned by all but a handful of newspapers.

But in the dimly lit, cluttered backshop at the eight-page *Citizen*, a Linotype still transforms the homespun reports of country correspondents into columns of shiny metal type.

What the Linotype casts in metal is printed on the *Citizen's* rumbling, 1905 vintage letter-press, fed one sheet at a time by the practiced hands of 69-year old Edwin Brown.

It is Thursday morning — paper day — and as Brown watches the press rumble along with the slow, steady wheeze of a steam locomotive, he nods with satisfaction and ventures an opinion on the merits of his reliable old machine.

"It's a corker," he declares.

Brown and two of his brothers, like their father before them, give the news to Bethel — population 2,500. In September, they sold a controlling interest to new publisher Bernie Wideman, who will take the composing room into the 1980s.

Already, a modern phototype-setter waits beneath a plastic dropcloth in the antique composing room — a spacecraft under wraps in a surrey factory.

Why didn't the Browns modernize long ago?

John Brown, who at 55 is the *Citizen's* editor, Linotype operator, and co-pressman — and

who retains a minority interest in ownership — has the answer. He says that his late father, Carl, had no complaints about hot-type printing and that's reason enough.

"After all, he was here for 52 years — you get the feeling that anything he stuck with that long is worth hanging on to," says Brown.

Wideman's problem, though, is that the Browns — who are staying on but are getting older — are just about the only ones in Oxford County who can run the aging equipment. And getting parts for a Linotype machine is only one notch easier than getting parts for a Stanley Steamer.

Wideman says that while typesetting will soon be computerized, the old Linotype will remain in service to help with commercial printing such as posters and letterheads.

The newspaper copy set on Bernie Wideman's new computer will be used to make up pages that will be printed outside the Citizen's backshop, on a modern offset press at the Sun-Journal in Lewiston.

The Browns say that despite their old-fashioned equipment, they have always given Bethel and surrounding villages the important news of small town life — minus the sensationalism of the big city press.

It's homespun, for sure — but that's what a lot of people like, says reader Don Bennett, office manager at the Bethel Inn, in this White Mountain village, where tourism and lumber operations anchor the economy.

There's hardly a soul within 15 miles of Bethel who doesn't get it and read every word in it," he says.

Wideman, 48, who came in last September after three years as editor of the prize-winning Ipswich, Mass., Chronicle, said he had some ideas about changing the format as well as the printing equipment, but quickly reversed direction.

"I was used to chasing cops and buttonholing selectmen, and this paper was talking about who helped whom bring in a cord of wood, and what the Boy Scouts were up to — as front page stories. It took me a few weeks to realize that this was a fine reflection of what was going on in the community," he says.

Another thing about this paper:

It doesn't dwell on the negative, says Musa Brown, the Citizen's bookkeeper, office manager, and official greeter.

"Sensationalism — we never use that. Even in obituaries, we don't tell the sordid details, even if we know. People say they like to read the paper because it's refreshing — they don't get the bad things."



The news comes from correspondents like Colista Morgan, who retired from teaching at a one-room schoolhouse. She finds news not only in long lists of items detailing who has called upon whom, but also in the natural beauty of the Maine mountains.

After a walk, she tells her readers, "I caught the rattle of a red squirrel, the nasal conversation of nuthatches, and a breeze stirring the beech leaves. . . . Now, as I write this, it is a time of calm reflection; a blossom of lemon color in the sky, across the pond, then turning to a deep orange beyond the hills. Twilight drops into night between one footstep and another."

### **Aked D. Ellingwood**

Aked D. Ellingwood was the owner of what would become the first of Bethel's regular weekly newspapers which has now lasted now in 2011 for 116 years. According to Ernest Bowler's account of Ellingwood's startup, the business began as a printing shop located in the rear of the Cole Block in the spring of 1895. Mr. Bowler described it as a small job printing office that operated with only one small press and a few fonts of type and a few fonts of type. The first issue of The Bethel News was dated June 5, 1895. At this point, however, there is very little background information about Mr. Ellingwood. In 1915 he was recorded as a New England Mutual insurance agent in Groveton, NH. Mr. Bowler wrote in 1904 that after purchased a half interest in the News in September 1897, he had purchased the remainder of the business in March 1898. After that there was some news about Ellingwood going to Vermont and then further news that he was suffering some illness. He became a patient of Dr. Gehring.

In the first edition of the News, the editor, Ellingwood wrote a column on what he saw as the newspaper's goal: We give you as good a paper as our limited acquaintance with the area and people enable us to do. For nearly a year we have had the establishment of a newspaper at Bethel under consideration. The News will be published Wednesday of each week; the subscription rate is \$1.25 per year, payable in advance. The paper will be non political and its object will be to further the interests of Bethel and surrounding country, to furnish news of the County and to furnish pure reading for all classes. We solicit articles with items of interest from everybody.

### **Ernest Bowler**

Ernest C. Bowler, editor and publisher was born in Palermo, Maine May 6, 1870, son of Silas H. and Mary M. Farrow Bowler. Graduated Castine Normal School 1890, on January 31, 1891, married Mabel Dingley. The Bowlers had two children Ernest C

Bowler, Jr., born December 25, 1894, and Mary Ernestine Bowler, born November 9, 1906. Mr. Bowler was Superintendent of Palermo schools four years, Superintendent of Bethel Schools for two years, and president of Waldo County Teachers Association. In 1897 purchased Bethel News; Mr. Bowler established the Rumford Citizen 1906 and consolidated the Bethel News and Rumford Citizen in 1908. In 1914 he purchased the Reporter Journal a daily and weekly newspaper in Gardiner where he is editor and manager of the papers. He was a director the Bethel National Bank; member of the Republican County Committee and a member of the Maine House of Representatives for 1913 and 1914. Mr. Bowler is a Congregationalist, a Mason and a member of the Odd Fellows lodge. Mr. Bowler had purchased the Goodwin Wiley house around the time Mr. Wiley left for Oklahoma; In 1908 purchased the Wiley house from Bowler in order that it be remodeled to serve as a boys and girls dormitory. Sources: New England Who's Who; East Bethel Road by Eva Bean; 1904 Bethel News

### **FRED B. MERRILL**

The son of Edmund Merrill, Jr., and Emma (Bean) Merrill, started life in the same house in which he is now living (on Broad Street later the home became part of the Bethel Inn). He attended the common schools of the town, graduating from Gould Academy in 1896; Bowdoin College in 1899 and Harvard Law School in 1905.

During the years 1905 to 1912 he was associated with, Herrick & Park in the practice of law and' the management of Bethel Savings Bank and Bethel National Bank, leaving in 1913 to manage and edit the Oxford County Citizen. (All of the noted businesses were located in the Cole Block.) After seven years in the newspaper business he returned to the Bethel National Bank as Assistant Cashier, the position he now holds. He is also a Director of the Bank, a Trustee of Gould Academy, and Bethel Library Association, Secretary of Bethel Lions Club, and a member of the various Masonic fraternities including the Shrine. Source: 1931 Special Edition of The Oxford County Citizen

### **Carl L. Brown (1893-1963)**

Carl L. Brown was a native of Berlin, NH born July 3, 1893, the only son of Leslie and C. Luella (Kimball) Brown. His education was received in the Berlin and Bethel schools and at Gould Academy.

He married Miss Ruth Mason and they had five sons: Edwin L. Stanley L., Donald S., Irving W., and John K. Their oldest son, Robert, died in the summer of 1929.

Mr. Brown has always been connected with newspapers and printing offices and is the editor of The Oxford County Citizen. Following his student days (in 1911 he graduated from Gould Academy and began employment at the Citizen office) he worked in

the printing office where he is now editor and was employed on the Independent Reporter in Skowhegan for a while. In connection with the publishing of this paper he conducts a first class job and book printing department. He is a popular editor, is always behind any progressive movement for the town, and gives each week in the columns of his paper a large amount of space for advertising of community doings.

Mr. Brown is a member of the Mt. Abram Lodge, I.O.O.F., Col. C. S. Edwards Camp, S. of U.V. and the Methodist Church. Mr. and Mrs. Brown and their lively family live in the Brown home on the Locke Mills road. Source: 1931 Special Edition of The Oxford County Citizen.

In December of 1942, Carl and Ruth Brown and their youngest son, John, moved into the house on Kilborn Street known as the Hall house as tenants. They rented it through the winter, and on 12 August 1943 purchased the property. The Browns had previously lived on the family farm a short distance south of town, and their move into the village was, at least in part, a response to the gas rationing of World War II, making it possible for Carl to more easily walk to the office of the *Bethel Citizen*, where he was editor.

John Brown lived with his parents until graduating from Gould Academy in 1950 and then marrying. In 1977 after the death of Ruth Brown, John returned and lived there until 1997. Source: Bethel's Hall House by Dana Brown Nickerson, 2006 Bethel Courier

### **John K. Brown**

When Carl Brown died in April 1963, John succeeded him as editor. As editor, John continued his father's policies; for instance one helpful feature was an annual review that usually appeared in the first issue of the New Year. During these years, Don Brown ran his own photography business which overlapped with his work at the Citizen. One of Don Brown's duties was to stroll down Main Street checking on businesses along the street to prime their advertising pump. During the 1970's and early 80's Don Brown seemed to be the member of the Citizen Printing group responsible for operating the offset press which was used for a variety of jobs, printing brochures for instance.

