

# JANESVILLE GAZETTE.

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Marking 175 years of history

A special product from The Gazette

\$2.50

## A local history book, decades in the writing

Today's news inside!

If journalism is “the first rough draft of history,” then The Gazette has spent 175 years writing a history book on this community.

It started publishing in 1845, eight years before Janesville incorporated and three years before Wisconsin was a state.

The Gazette is Janesville's oldest business.

This special section takes a look at Janesville's history as told through 175 years of Gazette journalism. We couldn't include



SID SCHWARTZ

everything, but this section gives a sample of news from almost all of the past 175 years.

Some of the items are about events that changed the community.

**1848:** Capt. Ira Miltimore builds the Monterey Dam. Residents complained that the blasting of stones and general construction made it sound like the “Battle of Monterey.”

**1853:** The railroad has arrived in Janesville, with the first train pulling into a depot on a bluff east of the gas works, The Gazette reports in a Jan. 8, 1853, story.

Some are tragic.

**1873:** The McLean Woolen Mills at Monterey, the Notbohm Woolen Mills at Monterey, Cairns Bros. Dry Goods on Milwaukee Street and the H.A. Doty Feed Mill on North Main Street all burn down.

**1896:** Two men suffocate in Gray's cesspool on Locust Street. Some are odd.

**1897:** Judge Phelps of Hanover, who owns a large dairy and stock farm, plans to drain the nearby swamps and grow celery. His initial experiments with the crop have resulted in celery that is “said to be much superior to the Kalamazoo

celery.”

**1936:** Gerta Odegaard is chosen as the “healthiest girl” at the Rock County 4-H Fair. She also took home the prize for handicrafts.

Taken together, the collection of history drawn from Gazette pages tells the story of a community growing, overcoming adversity, struggling with change and looking forward.

We can only hope for more of the same in Janesville's future.

*Sid Schwartz arrived at The Gazette as a reporter in 1990 and has been editor since 2015.*

## The news through the years

By Catherine W. Idzerda

Special to The Gazette

JANESVILLE—In 1845, Levi Alden and E.A. Stoddard decided it was time for Janesville to have its own newspaper.

Although the local population was a mere 850 people, Janesville was a bustling place and showed potential for growth.

It already had a watchmaker, saddle and harness maker, barbershop, copper and tinsmith, gunsmith and painter. The city also boasted three grocery stores, three stonecutters, three millwrights and three schools. Five doctors cared for the sick. Six lawyers attended to legal matters. Two brickyards and two small factories that built agricultural equipment made Janesville an important center of commerce.

Alden and Stoddard were watching the community—and Rock County—grow around them.

The two men bought a Washington hand press from Detroit and had it shipped to Milwaukee. From there, it was hauled to Janesville by a team of oxen.

The publishers promised that politics would be the newspaper's main focus, but topics in the “departments of Agricultural, Literary and Miscellaneous” also would be covered.

In those early days, the front page usually featured a serial story, and long columns were devoted to Whig Party politics. The news was mostly local until 1848, when the telegraph arrived in the city.

Along with reporting the news, The Janesville Gazette was a devoted civic booster. In the early decades of the 20th century, the newspaper usually published an end-of-the-year edition looked back at the number of new houses and businesses built during the year.

In the middle decades, that boosterism evolved into special sections celebrating significant milestones: the opening of new schools, the growth of businesses such as Parker Pen and General Motors, and the city's centennial and sesquicentennial. In 1967, The Gazette even ran a special section celebrating the 1 million square yards of concrete pavement.

Before the arrival 24-hour cable news stations and then



Gazette file photo

An aerial illustration looking down the Rock River in Janesville in 1877.

the internet, The Gazette was a reliable source for national, state and local news. Sunday classifieds were a lucrative source of income and a valuable asset to bargain hunters, job seekers, real estate agents and car dealers.

In those days, newspaper carriers strained under the weight of the Sunday edition, and a newspaper hit a reader's porch with a satisfying plop.

Now, the sound of the news is more likely to be the double click of a mouse.

One thing hasn't changed: The Gazette remains committed to local news and local people.

Here is a sampling of the people and issues we've reported on over the years.

### 1845

In their first issue of the newspaper, Levi Alden and E.A. Stoddard introduce themselves to the 850 residents of Janesville: “To the Citizens of Rock and Walworth Counties: No apology, and but few remarks are necessary, in laying our Prospectus before the public. This community, by the lively interest it has already taken in the enterprise, has virtually demanded the establishment of a Press at this place; and it is but to meet this demand, that we have been induced to undertaking that which might otherwise seem extremely hazardous.”

Subscriptions are \$2 a year. A 14-line advertisement costs “50 cents for first

insertion, and 25 cents for every subsequent insertion.”

Construction is completed on a dam and raceway, giving the city water power.

### 1846

Thrice-weekly stagecoach routes are established between Janesville and Milwaukee.

Capt. Ira Miltimore builds the first Monterey Bridge.

### 1847

Janesville's population hits 1,485.

The “Big Mill,” located on the Rock River just north of the Milwaukee Street Bridge, is finished, giving local farmers a place to bring their grain.

Local investors fret over the arrival of the telegraph line.

The Gazette reports, “Col. Speed and Mr. Cornell met here last evening to confer with the stockholders of the Telegraph. Col. Speed authorizes us to say that notwithstanding all reports to the contrary, he is going on with the construction of the line with the same vigor as ever ...”

By November, the telegraph company opens an office on East Water Street.

William Pitts, the author of the popular hymn “The Church in the Wildwood,” or the “Church in the Vale,” settles in the town of Union.

### 1848

Telegraph lines arrive in Janesville.

Capt. Ira Miltimore builds

the Monterey Dam. Residents complained that the blasting of stones and general construction made it sound like the “Battle of Monterey.”

James Sutherland opens the first bookstore in the Lappin Block at the corner of Main and Milwaukee streets.

Wisconsin becomes a state.

### 1849

Mail service between Janesville and Milwaukee is established.

Donations are solicited to build a “School for the Education of the Blind.” Capt. Ira Miltimore donates 10 acres of land, part of which is still in use. The school starts in a house owned by Miltimore and later moves to a larger place on Jackson Street.

### 1850

Janesville's population reaches 3,100.

Payne, Hastings and Co. builds the first woolen mill in Janesville.

### 1851

Work begins on a building for the State School for the Blind. Students move in in 1852.

The first Wisconsin State Fair is held east of Upper Courthouse Park and is sponsored by the Rock County Agricultural Society and the State Fair Association.

The Oak Hill Cemetery

Timeline continues on Page 3

## Evolution of news gathering

By Frank Schultz

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The relationship between a newspaper and its community is a special one. And the smaller the community, the more special the relationship can be.

Several American newspapers over the years have used the slogan “The only newspaper in the world that gives a damn about ...”

“That's a really good way to put it, because it's true,” said James Kates, a specialist in media history in the UW-Whitewater Department of Communication.

The Gazette has used the more sober “Local matters” slogan in recent times, but the idea is similar.

The Gazette's bond with Janesville and environs started 175 years ago. It's likely the relationship took time to develop between the community and the weekly paper produced on a hand-operated press.

For starters, journalism as we know it was in its infancy in 1845, and writers were mostly concerned about airing opinions, said Steve Rogstad of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center.

Rogstad has read many a newspaper in that period in his lifelong pursuit of Abraham Lincoln history and is author of the forthcoming book about Lincoln in Wisconsin, “Among the Badgers.”

“Objective journalism was a foreign concept” in the 1800s, and newspapers were all about political affiliations, Rogstad said.

For example, Republican newspapers made Lincoln look like the champ in the famed Lincoln-Douglas debates, while Democratic papers called Lincoln a buffoon, Rogstad said.

The Gazette started as a Whig paper, endorsing Whigs for president in 1848 and 1852 before shifting to the fledgling Republican Party.

The charge of “fake news” would be familiar to newspaper readers in the early days, when information often was printed to serve a political purpose, Rogstad said.

Advertising took up much of the front pages of early Gazettes, and local news, what there was of it, was consigned to back pages.

Professional journalism as we know it developed in the early 1900s, but it was many decades before a college education was required to work as a reporter or editor, Kates said.

Janesville had a number of papers come and go through the early years,

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