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FROM OUR ARCHIVES

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er's strange ad

RISE OF SENSATIONALISM

Headlines have been used to communicate a story's idea for much longer than the 225 years of Lancaster newspapers. However, as front pages have changed drastically over time, it's in the 19th century that we begin to see a rise in the use of sensationalism as a way to sell newspapers. What we recognize now as "tabloid magazines," such as The New York Sun and Joseph Pulitzer's New York World, premiered midway through the 19th century. As these national magazines quickly gained prominence, local papers would attempt to play catch-up with some shock of their own. Pictures and cartoons had yet to take up valuable real estate on the page, so there was more room for short, outrageous tales to keep readers enthralled.

Take for instance the headline on the top left of this page: "He's quite a Pooh-bah: Convict Gould conducts a Maine prison at his pleasure." In just six long sentences, readers

are told the story of William E. Gould, who, after embezzling \$180,000, somehow ended up running the prison in which he was locked up. Not only did he allegedly pay the bills of the institution, but it's noted that he also served as clerk, assistant librarian, choir member, assistant physician and assistant watchman. If true, is it an interesting story? Of course. Are the supposed goings-on of a prison nearly 550 miles away relevant to the interests of a Lancastrian in 1891? Probably not, but before tabloid magazines, reality TV and Twitter, this was one of the public's few chances to experience something scandalous.

Other national headlines of questionable substance included lurid tales of kidnappings, arrests, familial murder, military disobedience, drownings and natural disasters. Part of the shock in seeing these stories with a modern eye is a result of the haphazard placement of stories. A short report of a flood in Pittsburgh sits directly next to the headline "Cut in

twain by saw," which details the sad tale of a Northampton man who tripped and fell into his own circular saw.

The few Lancaster stories on the bottom right side of the page are positively charming in comparison to the grisly tales on the left. The Lancaster Kennel Club hosted a fox chase, only for the fox to outsmart them and escape. A horse was sold from Joseph Hess of Quarryville to Michael McGonigle of the city. "Chance for a bright boy" details the search put out from Lafayette College for one lucky student to receive a free year of engineering school.

In the following decades, local news stories would begin to outnumber sordid national stories such as ones found on this page. Of course, the emergence of television and, later, social media would ensure that there would never again be a shortage of easily accessible outrage.



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