
MARYLAND SOURCES:
The Historic Newspaper Indexing Project for
Hagerstown, Maryland, Newspapers (1790–
1890) at the Washington County Free Library

By Joseph Berger

The Historic Newspaper Indexing Project 1790–1890 for Hagerstown, Maryland, newspapers was established in 1982 to index, by subject, every article of local significance in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century weekly papers.¹ Genealogists seeking information about families who resided in Washington County, southern Pennsylvania, and the eastern panhandle of West Virginia will want to incorporate microfilmed newspapers into their ancestral research. The Historic Newspaper Indexing website also features several articles on topics—including the Civil War and cholera—that highlight newspaper content.

Indexing is complete for 1790 to 1854 and 1860 to 1865. Indexing of the late Antebellum Era (1855 to 1859) continues as of this writing and covers the sole surviving newspaper, *The Herald of Freedom and Torch Light*, circa 1851 to 1863. No copies of its chief competitor at that time, the *Hagerstown Mail*, have been located. The project's goal is to extend the index from 1866 through 1890. Publication format began with print volumes but has now, at least partially, migrated to online availability. See TIPS FOR SEARCHING THE INDEX (below).

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CONTENT OF LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

Weekly newspapers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries devote much of their four-page format to advertisements and legal notices. The front page contains national and international news, typically reprinted from other newspapers. Occasionally, ads also appear on this page. The second page continues front page content, except during election campaigns when letters to the editor or political news might appear. The third page is usually reserved for local news; a subscriber would expect to see his local ad appear on this page as well. Literary pieces and subsequent appearances of ads comprise the fourth page. An infrequent fifth page contains election coverage, newly-passed legislation by the Maryland General Assembly, and an advertising supplement to promote local merchants.

First-time researchers of the Hagerstown newspapers on microfilm should consult the complete list of surviving and missing issues in *A Quick Reference Guide to Genealogy Research*. A downloadable copy of this guide is available on the Washington County Free Library's Genealogy Resources web page.²

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HAGERSTOWN NEWSPAPERS³

The first newspaper in Elizabeth-Town, as Hagerstown was once known, is the *Washington Spy*, started in 1790 by Stewart Herbert, and published until early 1797, under the editorship of his wife Phoebe Herbert. On 2 March 1797, Thomas Grieves published "Proposals of Continuing the Publication of a Weekly Newspaper in Elizabeth-Town" and commenced publication of the *Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Advertiser*. From 1805 to 1824 the paper's title was *Maryland Herald and Hagers-Town Weekly Advertiser*. The title reflects a popular usage of "Hagers-Town" for Elizabeth-Town and it likely wielded influence on the Maryland General Assembly's decision in January 1814 to change the town name.

In 1809, a second weekly publication was started—*The Hager's-Town Gazette*. This paper, edited by William Brown, has a Federalist leaning and its format is similar to that of its competitors. The editors of both papers frequently attacked the other in print and pointed out the other's printing errors. The last known issue of the *Hager's-Town Gazette* is 15 June 1813.

Shortly after the end of the *Hager's-Town Gazette*, a number of prominent men raised the capital to start the *Torch Light and Public Advertiser*. Its first editor was William D. Bell. The earliest mention of the paper is December 1814, although it probably dates to late 1813. Unfortunately, the earliest extant copies of the *Torch Light* are dated 1817.

The *Hagerstown Mail* was a conservative Democratic weekly founded by James Maxwell in 1828 and continued under various owners into the early twentieth century. The *Mail's* morgue, printing presses, and editorial offices on the Public Square were ransacked during a mob attack on 24 May 1862, in protest of editor and publisher Daniel Dechert's anti-Union rhetoric; no copies of its 1850s issues are extant. Maxwell also founded the *Herald of Freedom* in 1839, but sold it that year to Thomas E. Mittag and James E. Snearny who merged it with the *Torch Light* in 1851. *The Herald of Freedom and Torch Light*, the sole surviving Hagerstown newspaper of the 1850s on microfilm, and fully covered by the Historic Newspaper Index, became the *Herald and Torch Light* in January 1864 and ceased publication circa 1907.

To maximize the value of the Index's coverage of the aforementioned newspapers, researchers unfamiliar with Washington County and surrounding areas are urged to consult the name indexes of J. Thomas Scharf's *History of Western Maryland* (1882)⁴ and Thomas J. C. Williams's *History of Washington County, Maryland* (1906).⁵ These volumes profile many of the same individuals who populate the pages of the local newspapers, specifically those who owned property, operated

businesses, and participated in the cultural and social life of their cities, towns, and villages.

TIPS FOR SEARCHING THE INDEX

The Historic Newspaper Index covers three geographical areas: Maryland (Washington, Frederick, Allegany and Garrett counties); Pennsylvania (Cumberland, Adams, Fulton and Franklin counties); and West Virginia (Berkeley, Jefferson and Morgan counties). However, the index's primary focus is news and opinion from the perspective of Hagerstown and Washington County.

The Historic Newspaper Index's website features searchable Adobe PDF editions of *An Index to Hagerstown Newspapers*, 1790 to 1814, and an online database that covers 1845 to 1865. In addition to the anticipated completion of the late Antebellum Period, 1855–1859, a project has been undertaken to modernize the 1815–1819, 1820–1824 (a two volume set), and 1825–1829 print volumes as searchable Adobe PDF documents. Indexes that cover 1830–1834, 1835–1839, and 1840–1844 and chronicle the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (c. 1828–1850) are exclusively print editions available for use in the library.⁶ The respective themes of the 1845–1849 and the two-volume 1850–1854 index are “Westward Expansion” and the “Antebellum Period.” Coverage includes the *Hagerstown News*, *Herald of Freedom*, *Pledge and Advocate for Moral Reform*, *Torch Light*, *Torch Light and Public Advertiser*, and *Weekly Casket*.

Years	Format	Future Plans
1790–1797	Searchable PDF (<i>Washington Spy</i> only) ⁷	
1797–1804	Searchable PDF ⁸	
1805–1809	Searchable PDF ⁹	
1810–1814	Searchable PDF ¹⁰	
1815–1819	Print edition ¹¹	Searchable PDF
1820–1824	Print edition ¹² (two volume set)	Searchable PDF
1825–1829	Print edition ¹³	Searchable PDF

Years	Format	Future Plans
1830–1834	Print edition ¹⁴	
1835–1839	Print edition ¹⁵	
1840–1844	Print edition ¹⁶	
1845–1849	Online database	
1850–1854	Online database	
1855–1859	Online database; Indexing in progress	
1860–1865	Online database	

Index citations include a page number (one through four, although pages are typically unnumbered) and column label (A through G). This system enables the researcher to identify the exact location of an article.

The citation record for each article in the Historic Newspaper Index’s database follows a strict protocol: Page/Section, Title with a brief summary, name of the newspaper and publication date.

Article Details	
Page Section:	2B
Title:	TOWN IMPROVEMENTS. (UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH’S NEW SANCTUARY ON EAST FRANKLIN STREET; GEORGE R. BOWMAN’S LARGE THREE-STORY BUILDING ON WEST WASHINGTON STREET; WILLIAM M. MARSHALL’S ENLARGED BUSINESS HOUSE ON THE SOUTHEAST CORNER OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE IN HAGERSTOWN).
Newspaper:	HF&TL
Pub Date:	11 Aug 1858

Subject headings relevant to ancestral research appear underneath the Article Details. Examples: BOWMAN, GEORGE R.; MARSHALL, WILLIAM M.; PUBLIC SQUARE (HAGERTOWN); and UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH (HAGERSTOWN). Subject headings for Hagerstown street names appear in this format: EAST FRANKLIN STREET (HAGERSTOWN), WEST WASHINGTON STREET (HAGERSTOWN).

Entering an ancestor's last name and first name into the Index's search box will result in a list of articles about that person. All compound surnames are entered without a space, e.g., Van Horne = VANHORNE. Remember to check for ALL possible spellings of a person's name; there may be more than one subject heading for the same individual due to newspaper misspellings.

The third page of each weekly issue should be scanned for the most recent legal notices, marriages, deaths, merchant advertisements, and sales of real estate and personal property. Legal notices were issued by the county courts following rulings on the settlement of estates and lawsuits brought before the court. The county sheriff held public sales of real estate and personal property to settle a citizen's outstanding debts for unpaid taxes or delinquency in making payment to a bank or merchant.


The Sheriff's Sale legal notice that appears in the 3 November 1858 issue of the *Herald of Freedom and Torch Light* illustrates the type of information in local newspapers useful to genealogists. Rarely will one encounter an article where enslaved female African Americans are cited with their names and ages. More often, newspapers will report of male slaves arrested for serious crimes, such as homicide, theft of his master's personal property, or escaping north to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

Sheriff's Sale.

BY virtue of three writs of *Fieri Facias*, issued out of the Circuit Court for Washington County, and to me directed, at the suit of the Washington County Bank, against the goods and chattels, lands and tenements of Andrew Hogmire, and for fees, I have seized and taken in execution all the estate, right, title, interest, trust, property, claim and demand, at law and in equity of the said Andrew Hogmire, in and to the following property to wit:—A CERTAIN TRACT OF LAND, CONTAINING


350 Acres of Land,

more or less, together with all the improvements and appurtenances thereunto belonging, being and lying in Washington County, and adjoining the lands of John J. Middlekauff, Daniel Reichard, Daniel H. Schnebly, the heirs of Isaac B. Rowland and others.

Also—A Two-story Brick Dwelling  **House and FOUR ACRES of LAND,** adjoining, and other improvements, being and lying in South Potomac Street, Hagerstown, and now in the occupancy of Marmaduke W. Boyd.

ALSO—THE FOLLOWING NEGROES, TO WIT:

Rebecca Belt	16 years old	Nancy	31 years old
Samuel	10 " "	Virginia	10 months "
Annetta,	31 " "	Infant girl	4 days "
Lydia	16 " "	Fanny	14 years "
Henrietta	12 " "	Mary	12 " "
William	10 " "	David	30 " "
Jones	28 " "	Elmer	4 " "
John	2 " "	Margaret	18 " "
Serena	22 " "	Otho	2 " "
Arthur	2 mo. "		

Also—A Red Roan Mare,  **Two Mules, a Dun Horse, a Grey Mare, a CALF, 3 large Shoats, 3 Cows, a Black Sow and Seven Pigs, 4 Small Shoats, a Sow and Pigs, lot of Corn in the Ears, Wagon Bed, Wagon and Grain Ladders, Old Cart, Jackscrew, Two sets Breechings, Three sets Plough Gears, Four Collars, Two Riding-bridles, Three Pitchforks, Maul and Rings, Double set carriage Harness, Falling Axe, Pair grain Ladders and Bolster, Revolving grain Rake, lot Oak Plank, Three Cow-chains, half-bushel Measure, Dung fork, Wheelbarrow, two Ricks Cornfodder, corn crusher and fixtures, Spade, Shovel, Scoop and Axe, Windmill, lot Flails and Rakes, barn Wagon, old Wagon Bed, lot Clover hay, old Carriage, lot Tight Barrel Stuff, Cross Cut Saw, two Vices, two Anvils, Bellows and Smith's Tools, Grindstone, Shaving-horse and Knife, lot Lumber, four grain Cradles, Boring machine, lot Ploughs and Harness. The product of about 90 Acres of Wheat in the ground last spring, estimated at 700 bushels now, pair Tables, about 12 yds. Carpet, doz. Chairs, Fender and Andirons, three Window-blinds, Cupboard, Saddle, Floor Oil Cloth, Secretary and Book Case, Mirror, Tenplate Stove and Pipe, Sideboard and Cases, Breakfast Table, lot Figured Carpet, Pictures and Frames, Map, 3 Bedsteads and Bedding, three Chairs, Washstand, Looking Glass, lot Carpet, 17 Barrels and Tenplate Stove.**

I hereby give notice that on **TUESDAY** the 30th day of November inst., between the hours of 10 o'clock A. M. and 2 o'clock P. M., in front of the Court-house, in Hagerstown, I will proceed to sell the above described Real Estate, and Negroes, at public sale to the highest bidder for cash. The Negroes will be sold in front of the Jail door, and that on **TUESDAY** the 18th day of November inst., on the premises, commencing at 10 o'clock A. M., I will proceed to sell the above described personal property at public sale to the highest bidder for cash.

JOHN M. BAUCK,
Nov. 3, 1858. Sheriff.

Figure 1. Sheriff's Sale. *Herald of Freedom and Torch Light*, Wednesday, 3 November 1858, page 3B.

Advertisements for real estate sales, public and private, provide the geographic location of an ancestor's residence, indicate the acreage of his land holdings, and identify his nearest neighbors. Other notices with ancestral details are rulings in Circuit Court lawsuits and Orphans Court probate cases, which point you to the original documents kept either at the Washington County Court House or at the Maryland State Archives in Annapolis. Wealthy citizens in a rural community, such as Andrew Hogmire, owned significant portfolios of real estate and personal property. In contrast, a tenant farmer who quit farming in Washington County in the 1850s to move west would advertise the sale of his personal property, such as livestock, farm equipment and household goods.

CONCLUSION

The Historic Newspaper Index's value to genealogists is providing precise links to information about individuals and families who resided in the Western Maryland region, from the Federal Period (c. 1790 to 1823) to the Civil War (1861–65). As digital archives of local newspapers grow, our goal of extending coverage through 1890 has taken on new urgency and purpose. Both genealogists and local historians alike will welcome revelations in the Index that provide direct access to newspaper content after more than a century in obscurity.

REFERENCES

¹ Washington County Free Library, *Historic Newspaper Index*, c2010–2019; www.washcolibrary.org/hni.

² Washington County Free Library, "Genealogy Resources at WCFL," guide; www.washcolibrary.org/genealogy. *A Quick Reference Guide to Genealogy Research*, rev. ed., April 2019; www.washcolibrary.org/assets/documents/WCFL_Guide_To_Genealogy_Booklets-2019.pdf.

³ The brief history presented here is a compilation of material included in the preface pages of the volumes cited below in reference notes 7–16.

⁴ J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Western Maryland, Being a History of Frederick, Montgomery, Carroll, Washington, Allegany, and Garrett Counties from the Earliest*

Period to the Present Day: including Biographical Sketches of Their Representative Men (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1882); digital images, *Internet Archive* (www.archive.org/details/historyofwestern01scha/page/n8).

⁵ Thomas J. C. Williams, *A History of Washington County Maryland from the Earliest Settlements to the Present Time*, 2 vols. (1906, reprint; 1990s [?], Salem, Mass.: Higginson Book Co.); digital images, *Google Books* (www.books.google.com).

⁶ Print editions, detailed below, are available in several Maryland libraries, including the Maryland State Archives, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Maryland Historical Society's H. Furlong Baldwin Library, C. Burr Artz Library (Frederick), and the Washington County Free Library (Hagerstown). Individual print volumes as PDF documents are available for purchase with a Dropbox account. For volume pricing, visit the Historic Newspaper Index website and click the link for Pricing and Details.

⁷ Washington County Free Library, *An Index to Hager's-town Newspapers: The Washington Spy, August 26, 1790–February 1, 1797* (c1982, revised, 2015); available at www.washcolibrary.org/assets/documents/Washington_Spy_1790to1797.pdf.

⁸ Washington County Free Library, *An Index to Hager's-town Newspapers, March 2, 1797–December 28, 1804*, (c1982, revised, 2016); available at www.washcolibrary.org/assets/documents/Hagerstown_Newspapers_1797-1804.pdf.

⁹ Washington County Free Library, *An Index to Hager's-town Newspapers, January 1805–December 1809*, (c1983, revised, 2016); available at www.washcolibrary.org/assets/documents/Hagerstown_Newspapers_1805-1809.pdf.

¹⁰ *An Index to Hager's-town Newspapers, 1810-1814*, (c1984, revised 2018); available at www.washcolibrary.org/assets/documents/Hagerstown_Newspapers1810-1814.pdf.

¹¹ Washington County Free Library, *An Index to Hager's-town Newspapers, 1815–1819* (1985).

¹² Washington County Free Library, *An Index to Hager's-town Newspapers, 1820–1824* (1985).

¹³ Washington County Free Library, *An Index to Hager's-town Newspapers, 1825–1829* (1984).

¹⁴ Washington County Free Library, *An Index to Hager's-town Newspapers, 1830–1834* (1984).

¹⁵ Washington County Free Library, *An Index to Hagerstown Newspapers, 1835–1839, "The Canal Years,"* (1998).

¹⁶ Washington County Free Library, *An Index to Hagerstown Newspapers, 1840–1844, "The Canal Years,"* (1998).