

Bellaire Area Historical Society Essay

Newspaper: *The Antrim County News* Dates: 1947-1966

Special Features:

When no established newspaper would hire him, Ken Parker found another way to become a journalist. He started his own newspaper in Bellaire, Michigan and called his enterprise *The Antrim County News*. Its first edition was published on June 19, 1947 and was printed on an old flat-bed press. For years Parker had dreamed about the type of newspaper he wanted to publish. It would be folksy and down to earth. People would be more than names in this paper (Parker, 1999.)

Four villages in Antrim County had newspapers when *The Antrim County News* began. Parker sensed a dissatisfaction in the weeklies already in place. He was told they "lacked character" and were too confining. What made *The Antrim County News* unique is that Parker lined up several local contributors from all over the county (Parker, 1999.) Each weekly edition was filled with columns of interesting happenings and gossip from many of Antrim County's villages and townships including Alden, Mancelona, Bellaire, Atwood, Elk Rapids, Kewadin, Forest Home, Clam Lake, Central Lake, Ellsworth, South Torch Lake, Mancelona, Custer, and Antrim City. These local connections are very important and provide a first-hand account of area news of the day. They are a "gold mine" for anyone searching for "nuggets" of family and local history. The favorite column was titled Bell-Airings. It was a weekly snapshot of small-town life in Bellaire (the county seat) where local people could laugh at themselves, and that summer visitors could reconnect to the place they loved best (Parker, 1999.)

Ken Parker sold *The Antrim County News* in 1959 but continued to be involved with it until 1963. It was published under several different owners until 2009, receiving many press association awards for its writing and reporting.

Parker, K. (1999.) *Be Independent! Start Your Own Newspaper*. Traverse City, MI: Orchard Heights

Reasons Why These Newspapers Should be Digitized:

Antrim County, Michigan is a unique area with its picturesque small villages and its Chain-o'-Lakes. It has been a popular resort area since the early 1900's. There are generations of families who have fond memories of vacationing here. There are also generations of people who grew up in Antrim County and moved away as adults. Both groups have interest in the historical events of the area.

In our growing digital world, digital documents like *The Antrim County News* would provide easy

access to this newspaper for a variety of uses: genealogical research, tracing the history of a local park or recreation area, matching demographic statistics to stories of the era or geographical area being studied and much more.

In 1974, Gregg and Dee Smith bought *The Antrim County News* and offered the collection of local historic newspapers included with the purchase to the Bellaire Area Historical Society. These newspapers go back to 1895 and include the *Bellaire Independent* (1895-1919, the *Antrim County Record* (1920-1931) the *Bellaire Record* (1931-1955) and *The Antrim County News* (1947-1974.) This collection of physical newspapers has been added to over the years and is available to examine at the Bellaire Area Museum. These physical newspapers do not age well despite our best efforts to protect them. The older ones are very brittle and crumble when disturbed.

The newspapers listed above have been preserved on microfilm, but the entire collection is not available to examine in one place. Some are at the Traverse District Library and others at the State of Michigan Library in Lansing. There are also some at the Bellaire Public Library but the microfilm reader there is in need of repair.

The Bellaire Area Historical Society is currently raising funds to digitize our local historic newspapers and have them hosted on DigMichNews with searchable keywords. We believe that it is not only important to preserve the contents of this historic material, but to also make it accessible online to all who wish to examine and study it. Being awarded this grant would go a long way in helping us reach our goal. Thank-you for your consideration.