

# Grace A. Dow Memorial Library, Midland, MI Essay

Newspaper: Midland Daily News

## Special Features

To examine how the Midland Daily News is unique, it is necessary to examine how its community is unique. Between the start of 1938, when the (weekly) Midland Republican became the Midland Daily News, and 1977, Midland's population grew by 250% as Dow Chemical became an international company. The development of Dow as a company and Midland as a community served as a transition from Midland's early history as a logging community to its ongoing existence as a center of business and culture significant outside its local area. The Midland Daily News covered not only Midland County but also Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Gratiot, Isabella, and Saginaw counties – where it was available for delivery.

Although Midland remained relatively small for a community headquartering an international chemical company, Dow and Midlanders worked to make their city a place where people would want to live. The newspaper of that period reflects that work: it covers not only the local and wider-area business news but also the burgeoning cultural life of the region, reporting on sports, musical groups, lecture clubs, and more.

During this era, the Midland Daily News also covered the career of Alden B. Dow, the only architect ever named architect laureate of Michigan. Through his studio's work, Midland became a center for midcentury modern architecture; the community is full of residences and community buildings he and his colleagues designed. Newspaper coverage of his work gives a contemporary picture of the planning, construction, and public reception of his architectural designs.

Most employees of Dow during this time were men, many with wives who did not work outside the home – but who built an intellectually engaged community. The newspaper gives a unique look into the day-to-day lives of the women of this area, as they planned and held cultural and educational events which enriched area residents' lives. That is not to say that no women in Midland worked; the Midland Daily News itself employed an example unusual for the time in managing editor Claire Morrill. Morrill stayed on from the Republican, which she had co-owned, and continued working for the MDN through 1945.

The 20th-century Midland Daily News covered government and court news related to Midland's role as the county seat. It also gave insight into the lives of the 20-25,000 residents of smaller communities nearby, both inside and outside Midland County: Floyd, Porter, Mount Haley (North and South), Pine River, North Bradley, Larkin, Mapleton, Averill, Pleasant Valley, Freeland, Beaverton, and Gladwin. Articles and weekly columns in the Midland Daily News reported the goings-on in these outlying communities, many of which are not only not reported on in other

newspapers but also poorly covered – or not included at all – in the residential directories of the time.

The Midland Daily News deserves to be preserved and made available for research. Covering the business, labor, arts, genealogical, and educational history of Midland County and its surrounding area, this paper is valuable to not only our local area but also the region, state, country, and world.

Why should this newspaper be made available online? Why is it a high priority for your organization and your community? How will having this newspaper available online contribute knowledge about your region and Michigan history?

When the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library opened its doors in January 1955, the publishers of the Midland Daily News, and its predecessors the Midland Sun and the Midland Republican, joined together to “assure that the public will have access to this community’s complete history” by donating their respective papers’ physical and microfilm newspapers to the library. (MDN, 1/21/1955, p17 – Library Supplement)

The trio of publishers was right in wanting to ensure that the newspaper history of mid-Michigan is preserved at our library. There is nothing like the day-to-day nature of the newspaper to give the feel of a story or an event, local or national: local events aren’t covered elsewhere, and journalists frequently find local significance or connections for national events.

While it is reassuring to know that the Midland newspapers have been microfilmed for preservation, our access to their content is limited. For the Midland Daily News from 1937-1962, we have no index for anything but obituaries. When we field a question that involves research during that era, it is heartbreakingly frequent to see the patron’s face fall as we ask how close they can get to the exact date they need.

Library staff began some headline indexing in 1963, but it is scanty, especially early on. The indexing focuses on local government and institutions and a few dozen names per year (mostly local politicians and businesspeople). It is better than no indexing, but much that people want is omitted. Most local history questions we receive deal with businesses, events, or people from the 1940s through the 1970s; those decades, with no digitization and only limited/partial indexing, represent the biggest gap in what we are able to offer.

Public library employees get to know what materials our patrons expect us to have. Ours are always surprised to find out that we do not have digital access to the Midland Daily News for most years of the 20th century. And they are disappointed when they learn we lack even an index for decades of the newspaper’s existence – a range of time which saw tremendous change in our community, as it increased dramatically in size and saw its main industry go global.

Digitizing the Midland Daily News would make the history of Midland County and its surrounding region more accessible not only to our local patrons but also to the rest of

Michigan and the wider world. Midland is an unusual community; as Dow Chemical became an international company, Midland began to see resident employees transfer to and from company sites across the USA and abroad. As a result, many people across the state and around the world have ties to Midland.

We field questions from everywhere: journalists and academics wanting to research local historical events – sometimes controversial – that made the national news; architecture fans wanting to know more about Midland's midcentury modern buildings; people who grew up here wanting stories about their old family business; genealogists with family ties here needing information beyond vital records; historians researching the lives of women or minorities in the area; current Midland residents wanting to know more about local history to inform their views about the region's direction moving forward.

Our librarians have assisted several authors in researching books and articles about the history of Midland, regional residents, and Dow company history and scientific advances, among others. But without indexing and without a searchable newspaper, our ability to help is hamstrung. And not everyone – especially those who aren't local – can easily stop into the library and spend hours or days looking through microfilm.

It is clear that our patrons are fascinated by historical newspapers. We occasionally need to bring out the bound papers for research when our microfilm is illegible. Every time one of those huge, old books hits the Reference Desk, multiple people ask to see it. Everyone has something they would look up.