

Delta Sources and Resources

Historic Arkansas Newspapers available for free as part of Chronicling America

The Library of Congress's Historic American Newspapers collection (online)

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Since 1905, the Arkansas State Archives (ASA) has collected and preserved official records and historical materials for the State of Arkansas. It has amassed a vast collection of state, county, and federal records, manuscripts, military records, newspapers, family histories, and genealogical resources. Newspapers, however, are at the heart of the Arkansas State Archives and are the most requested resource in the collection.



The Arkansas State Archives has operated its newspaper microfilming program since 1957. Its archives contain the largest existing collection of Arkansas journalism, curating approximately 22,000 rolls of microfilm containing nearly 1800 titles and representing all 75 of the state's counties, with an estimated page count exceeding 22 million. The Arkansas State Archives is the

only institution in Arkansas that still microfilms historic and current Arkansas newspapers.

In 2017 the Arkansas State Archives joined the Library of Congress's (LoC) National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP) and began to digitize its historic newspapers of record. Today, more than 300,000 pages of curated Arkansas newspapers are digitized with an additional 100,000 to be completed by the end of August 2025. Dates of these digitized newspapers range from 1819 (with the recent addition of the *Arkansas Gazette*) to 1959 with the *Arkansas State Press*, owned and operated by Daisy and Lucious Bates. These digitized newspapers are part of the Library of Congress's (LoC) Historic American Newspapers collection and can be accessed for free at Chronicling America: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/>.

The digitized titles include several from Arkansas's Delta region. Most chronicle the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and cover a range of topics and readership from the following communities: Arkansas Post, Brinkley, Carlisle, Dermott, Des Arc, DeWitt, Dyess, Forrest City, Gillett, Helena, Marianna, McCrory, McGehee, Napoleon, Newport, Osceola, Paragould, Pine Bluff, and Stuttgart.

The largest amount of content submitted from a single title comes from the *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic*, with daily and semi-weekly issues from 1893-1920. The *Graphic* chronicles an era of prosperity in Pine Bluff, then the third largest city in Arkansas. During this time the city was a transportation hub and agricultural center for Southeast Arkansas.

Many Delta newspapers selected for digitiza-

tion showed their support for the Democratic party but there were exceptions to this. The *Southern Shield* from Helena, for instance, was published by Quincy K. Underwood, a nationally prominent member of the Whig Party. The title suspended publication during the Civil War after secessionists burned its building in response to its support of the Union cause. Published between November 1860 and April 1861, *Constitutional Union* from Des Arc contained arguments for remaining in the United States as a counter to the *Citizen* (1854-1869) which supported secession. The *Citizen* was known for printing news transmitted via telegraph from Memphis. Both newspapers are available on *Chronicling America*.

The Delta region contributes newspapers published for African American and immigrant communities such as the *Forrest City Herald*. Affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the *Herald* promoted African American communities as well as church objectives. Seven issues from 1896 (the only remaining issues) have been digitized. Issues of the *Negro Spokesman*, from Pine Bluff, representing African American interests rather than any one political party, were published from 1938 to circa 1958; the two surviving issues are included. The *Stuttgart Germania*, a German language newspaper, was published from 1895-1913 and served the immigrant population that founded the town, Stuttgart, as a colony in the 1870s; nine issues exist from 1908.

Most recently, titles were selected that demonstrate the environmental impacts of economic development particularly from communities in which agriculture, timber, mining, and oil production were significant, from 1819-1942. Issues of the *Forrest City Times and Herald* 1920-1928, and the *Courier-Index*, Marianna, 1921-1930 were included as a result of their role as central hubs



The front page story of the Mariana *Courier-Index*:
April 21, 1927 (The Great Flood).
Image courtesy of the authors.

for refugees displaced from the 1927 Mississippi River flood. The *Arkansas Gazette*, founded in 1819 at Arkansas Post and at Little Rock since 1820, consistently promoted immigration and land sales, while documenting life in Arkansas settlements and early “agribusiness.”

Collaborating with the Butler Center at the Central Arkansas Library System, Historic Dyess Colony Heritage Site managed by Arkansas State University, and Special Collections at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, the Arkansas State Archives has assembled a nearly complete run of the *Colony Herald*, 1936-1937, from the Dyess Colony in Mississippi County. The colony offered relocatees modest houses with electricity and water and the opportunity to support themselves by farming during the Depression. The *Herald* contained community news and farming

techniques. The paper was suspended from mid-January to mid-May 1937 as the colony was evacuated because of the 1937 flood. Singer Johnny Cash, the most famous resident of the Dyess colony, reflects on the rise of flood waters in his childhood home in his 1959 song, “Five Feet High and Rising.”

Newspapers relevant to the Delta region but not originating from the area include the *Arkansas Homestead*, *Arkansas Farmer & Homestead*, and *Arkansas Farmer* (Little Rock). These titles focus on agriculture statewide, dating from 1906-1930. Another group of papers related but not originating in the Delta include a collection of populist-related titles published in Faulkner, Pulaski, and White counties from 1895-1938. The populist movement originated in part with farmers’ frustration with low crop prices, lack of access to credit, and monopolies in transportation and marketing. Issues of the *Union Label Bulletin* and *Union Labor Bulletin* from Little Rock, 1903-1931 address concerns from various agricultural organizations in the early twentieth century and are now included on Chronicling America.

Since its migration to the Library of Congress’s collections website, Chronicling America now contains several Arkansas-specific titles not submitted by the Arkansas State Archives. A collection of miscellaneous African American titles from the LoC were added in 2022. Included in this collection were two titles from the Delta, each single issues from 1900, the *Pine Bluff Weekly Herald*, and the *Reporter* from Helena. Further additions were made in 2023 when the LoC began to reorganize their various online newspaper collections under the Chronicling America name. Two titles published in Japanese, by Japanese Americans detained at the Rohwer Relocation Center in Desha County, the *Rohwer Outpost*, 1942-1945, and *Rohwer Relocator*, 1945, are now available as part of Chronicling America.

For a full list of Arkansas newspapers currently digitized on the LoC’s Chronicling America website, visit <https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/dynamic-list-of-titles/> and search “Arkansas.”

The National Digital Newspaper Program is a partnership between the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Library of Congress. One cultural institution from each state works alongside the Library of Congress to digitize newspapers for that state, in grant cycles of 100,000 pages at a time. The Arkansas State Archives joined the project in 2017 and has digitized Arkansas’s newspapers of record, papers from underrepresented communities, and papers that demonstrate the relationship between the economy and the environment. All fifty US states along with Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have participated (or are currently participating) in this project. ▲▼▲

To learn more about the National Digital Newspaper Program, visit <https://www.loc.gov/ndnp/>.

For more Arkansas State Archives resources including search guides, lesson plans, topic guides, recipe booklets and activities for kids, visit <https://ar-digital.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/adnp>.

ADNP
ARKANSAS DIGITAL NEWSPAPER PROJECT