

History of Newspapers Published in Bland County, VA

Compiled from information found in the Archives of the Bland County Historical Society and in the "History of Bland County (1961)"

The history of newspapers in Bland County began with the first publication called "*The Religious Herald*" which was published between 1872 and 1876. This was a non-sectarian paper and was published by Rev. William Hicks and W.W.Hicks.

When "*The Religious Herald*" was liquidated in 1877, there appeared instead three newspapers; two at Bland and one at Mechanicsburg. These were as follows:

- "*Bland County Gazette*", established in 1877, edited and published by E. D. Ludwig.
- "*South and West*", published from 1877 to 1879 at Mechanicsburg.
- "*Green Back*", established in 1877, edited and published by E. D. Ludwig and J.M. Harmon. From 1878 to 1879 the same paper was edited by Dr. J. H. Hoge.

"*The Virginia Chronicles*" was edited in 1883, by West Dunlap as publisher and C. W. Dunn as local editor.

"*The South-West*", a weekly paper, independent, Republican and Democrat (depending on publisher), was established in 1877 and was edited by James S. Browning, 1877-80; by Dr. John H. Hoge, 1880-1882; by W.I. Boone and W.C. Hedrick, 1882-1886; by Hedrick, 1886-91; by Hedrick and Thomas J. Muncy, 1891-92; by Hedrick and Fulton Kegley, 1892-93; by B.C. Banks, 1893-94; by W.L. Umbarger, 1894-95; by C.W. Dunn, 1895-96; by J. V. Hall, 1896-1903.

"*The Mountain Watchman*", a weekly, independent, Democratic paper, was established in 1883 and was edited by John C. S. Sneed.

“The Reporter”, a weekly, was published at Bland from 1901-1905 and was an independent paper edited by L. Andrews and C. L. Sneed.

The paper and publication with the longest tenure in Bland County is the present publication, *“The Bland Messenger”*, established in 1904, a weekly, independent, Democratic paper which was edited by L. Andrews and Dunn until 1909. Andrews operated alone on the publication from 1909 to 1918, at which time Burton became a partner in the publication. This partnership lasted one year and in 1919 the publication was suspended. The paper was revived in 1922 by J. H. Porterfield and continued in circulation until 1928 under direction of Mr. Porterfield.

“The Tribune”, a weekly publication, was established in 1919 and edited by C. G. and S. W. Burton until it was discontinued in 1922.

In 1928, publication of the *“Bland Messenger”* was assumed by James Bascom Muncy, Sr., who edited and published it until his death on October 5, 1953.

Muncy started in the newspaper business at the early age of 19 and later purchased the “Bland Messenger”. During the 25 years that he published the Messenger, it was issued with punctuality and the circulation over doubled under his management. Muncy used his newspaper constantly for the betterment of Bland County.

James Bascom Muncy, Sr., was one of the most colorful, civic-minded men of his day, a relentless man in expressing his belief and a man of indomitable courage in promoting progress in his native county. Widely and affectionately known and remembered for his “Observer Column” in the “Bland Messenger”, he was always ready and unselfishly will to promote an objective that would put Bland “Up Front.”

The “Bland Messenger” was continued under the direction of his widow, Mrs. Lorraine C. Muncy, with her son Raymond McDonald Muncy, as assistant editor. Mrs. Muncy also continued writing the “Observer Column”. On January 1, 1958, the “Bland Messenger” was leased to the Southwest Virginia Enterprise Publishing Company, Wytheville, Virginia, with James A. Williams as editor. Lorraine C. Muncy was retained as associate editor until August, 1960.

More research needs to be done on the “Bland Messenger” to bring the history from August, 1960 to present day.

Jeff Simmons, who is the managing editor of the Bland County Messenger, has agreed to complete the history of the paper since it was sold by the Muncys. He said that there had been three owners since then.

Bland County Newspapers at the Bland County Historical Society

The Bland County Historical Society has a large collection of newspapers that have been published in Bland County. These newspapers are stored in acid free boxes and are organized by year. Care has been taken to preserve them since they do tend to deteriorate over the years.

If you need to access these newspapers, you must be assisted by a trained and authorized person at the BCHS office. We try to limit the handling of the papers since they are quite fragile. We hope someday to be able to digitize these newspapers. Please call us at 276-688-0088 to make an appointment for viewing the newspapers.

We are working to prepare a searchable database so that you may more easily find an event of interest. Over the past few years, the Bland County Messenger staff at the SWVA Enterprise Office has prepared an end of year index. (http://www.swvatoday.com/news/bland_county/article_c8de62a4-7191-11e3-99bd-0019bb30f31a.html). We will be doing something similar for our newspapers in order to form a searchable database.

How the Bland County Newspapers were added to our Historical Society Collection.

The Bland County Historical Society’s collection of Bland Messengers began in 2002, when Brenda King had the vision and foresight to see that this valuable resource of Bland County history should be collected and preserved. Her vision continues to become a reality. Since that time newspapers have been brought out of basements, closets, boxes, out buildings, etc. and given to the Society.

Following are the source of these newspapers:

- James “Jimbo” Muncy, a member of the society, donated a large collection of Messengers. Jimbo’s parents, James B. and Lorraine C. Muncy, once owned and operated the Bland Messenger.
- The late Tom Mallory, Jr. donated a large collection. His father, T.E. Mallory, had saved these Messengers.
- Others who donated to the collection included Brenda King, Ruby Atwell, Elizabeth Bird, Sally “Weedy” Hylton, Dean Compton, and others.

The Bland County Historical Society is very appreciative of anyone who donated to this project and to help to “Save Bland County History”.

Donations of papers are still being accepted. We will soon publish a list of issues that are missing from our collection. Please don’t throw any old issues – prior to 1950 that you might come across. If you have any newspapers to donate, please contact the Society at 276-688-3438.

Last year when we cleaned out the old jail, we sorted newspapers and found that we had an excess of Bland Messengers for some years, particularly the 1950s. We saved three copies of each papers. Then we bundled the papers by year and sold them. We still have some of these bundles left. You may acquire them by making a donation to the Bland County Historical Society (minimum \$5.00, but we would like more!)