

History of the Huntsville Item

Episode 33: May 6, 2008

Adapted, by permission of the Walker County Historical Commission, from: *The Huntsville Item*. (1986). In Walker County Historical Commission (Ed.), *Walker County, Texas: A History* (pp. 864-865). Dallas: Curtis Media.

Read by Cheryl Spencer, Library Associate in Special Collections.

The Huntsville Item was not the first newspaper established in Huntsville, but it has endured for more than 150 years.

The Huntsville Item was founded by George Robinson, who published the first edition on August 20, 1850. Before coming to Huntsville, Robinson, a native of Liverpool, England, had worked as a printer on the *Galveston News*. It is said that he moved to Huntsville because he thought the climate would be better for his asthma.

Research done by Mary Rainey dispels a common myth about *The Item*. Contrary to popular belief, it has not been published continuously since it was founded. One of the times regular weekly publication ceased was during the Civil War. On August 28, 1863, Robinson enlisted as a private in Company B, Infantry, 17th Brigade, Texas State Troops, for a period of six months. He was stationed at Camp San Jacinto near Huntsville. The few issues of *The Item* which Robinson managed to produce during this period are mostly single sheets, printed on both sides.

Then, at some point in the late 1860s, financial difficulties caused Robinson to cease publication for a while. *The Item* ceased publication sometime after January, 1867, and resumed publication sometime in 1869.

In those early years, newsprint and ink came to Huntsville by boat and ox cart. Printing supplies were unloaded at Galveston, put aboard steamers for Riverside or Cincinnati, and put on drays for the trip to Huntsville.

The Huntsville Item was destroyed by fire several times, first in 1878, then in 1884, 1892, and 1902. The most damaging of all happened sometime between 1903 and 1914. During previous fires, old copies of the paper since its inception had been saved. The last fire destroyed nearly all of these papers and the early records of *The Item*.

The Item went through a series of sales, mergers, and name changes over the years, including a merger with *The Huntsville Post* and a stint as *The Huntsville Post-Item*. However, in 1915, the paper was purchased by Ross Woodall, and by this time, it was called *The Huntsville Item* again. The Woodall family operated the paper until 1967, when it was sold to Harte-Hanks Incorporated and merged with *The Huntsville Pictorial*.

By January 1, 1970, *The Huntsville Item* published every Monday and Thursday. The frequency of publication increased gradually over the years, until *The Item* became a morning paper when the seventh edition was added in July 1983, and continues as a daily publication.

The Huntsville Public Library and the Newton Gresham Library at Sam Houston State University have collections of microfilm of the *Item* throughout its history.