

TWO BOYS AND A NEWSPAPER
The Saga of the *Trappe Enterprise*
by
James Dawson

In 1883, two teenagers from Trappe, Talbot County Maryland, 17 year old Charles H. Kemp and 16 year old Percy Mullikin, established a weekly newspaper named the *Trappe Enterprise*. In its short run from March 7, 1883 to September 30, 1885, these enterprising young editors wrote lively accounts of local news which present a fresh and fascinating glimpse of daily life in the golden age of this tidewater town. And while this news is specific to Trappe, it would be typical of much of Talbot County and the Eastern Shore.

This picture of life that would have been lost in any of the larger metropolitan newspapers with their crusty editors and streetwise reporters. Subscription was 75 cents per year or a dollar if not paid within a month, and even then the editors were sometimes hard pressed to collect their fees and issues are filled with pleas for subscribers to pay up. Circulation was probably only a few hundred copies.

Trappe was a flourishing town of 400 people containing twenty-seven businesses, four schools, four churches, and one large grist and lumber mill. This may seem a lot for a town that small, but it also served as the business nucleus for the lower part of the county in a time when travel was limited.

And so Trappe was just the right size town for this kind of neighborly newspaper, neither too big nor too small. If it was any larger, these everyday accounts would have been crowded out by more important news, any smaller and it would have not been able to support a newspaper at all. Of course, one could argue that in a town this size, where everyone knew everyone and everything anyway, no newspaper was needed, but this did not deter the *Enterprise* editors from their mission to publish a “well conducted, bright, spicy weekly newspaper”. And the misspellings and typos only added to the flavor.

These selections have been made mostly from the local news columns which included topics like social life, farming, race relations, technology, accidents, sickness, slang, weather, hunting, fishing, crabbing and oystering, recreation, law enforcement, religion and more, everything ranging from the comic to the tragic and anything in between. And if its editors were occasionally desperate for news, when seen from the perspective of a century and more, even the filler becomes interesting.

Only ninety two issues of the *Enterprise* have survived, they are in extremely fragile condition and are probably one of a kind copies. Although all have been examined, no attempt has been made to have included all of the news, but rather to give a good cross section of what was interesting to these two alert young men, whose accounts provide an enthusiastic and sometimes amusing peek into the everyday affairs of a nineteenth century farming community teetering on the tip edge of twentieth century technology.

These selections are given with all of their misspellings, and other errors of capitalization, etc. This is not done to make fun of these young men whose enthusiasm sometimes exceeded their orthography, but to give the full flavor of what it was like to read this remarkable newspaper. And frankly, it is somewhat refreshing these days to read words which have not been strained through the word processor of a computer.

The Good Ship *Enterprise*

In their inaugural issue of March 7, 1883, Charles and Percy published what would now be called their mission statement which is excerpted here:

“Salutatory. Believing that the time has come in the history of our little town, when there is sufficient enterprise and ability to sustain a well conducted newspaper, the undersigned have after mature deliberation, undertaken to publish in the town of Trappe, a weekly journal to be known as THE TRAPPE ENTERPRISE...

To bring our County to the highest development of which it is susceptible, and proclaim these advantages to the world, it is necessary that a well conducted, bright, spicy weekly newspaper should be published in Trappe.

And without attempting to forecast the future of the *Enterprise*, or the fate of its editors, as to their relation to the possibilities in life which are always open to aspiring young men, we launch our bark upon the stormy sea of Journalism, confidently expecting your hearty cooperation in making the *Enterprise* a brilliant success.

CHARLES H. KEMP.
PERCY MULLIKIN.”

“The Stormy Sea of Journalism”

We can get a good idea of what it was like to run a small town newspaper by the following excerpts. In those days, printing was done by a process called letterpress which involves setting by hand thousands and thousands of tiny pieces of type. They had already discovered in their first issue that it was all too easy to make mistakes and promised that “This number of our paper need not be considered a fair specimen. Our Editorial and Local columns will appear after the next issue in a new dress, and we shall endeavor to arrange them more neatly.” However good their intentions, misspellings and typos would plague the pages of the *Enterprise* for all of its short life.

Here we see that one of the boys grabbed one too many specimens of the letter *i* and made an embarrassing mistake in an advertisement where they offered their printing services to the public: “Anyone wishing Visiting cards, Business cards, Tags &c, &c., call us at the “Enterprise Office [sic].” One gets the impression that the *Enterprise* Office did not have a proof reader.

But visitors could wreck havoc also: “A dude came into the *Enterprise* office yesterday afternoon and sat down on the form, completely demolishing two columns [of hand set type]. He next went over and sat down on the cylinder press which was in motion, causing the Jr. Editor to have his hip dislocated. We wish the dudes would be more careful.”

The *Enterprise* staff begged its customers to pay for their subscriptions and advertisements and job printing and once scolded: “We do wish our subscribers would pay up their subscriptions. They ought to know, that it is impossible to run a paper without money.”

And finally, in this last example, they had apparently done some holiday printing in some sort of barter deal and were getting nervous for their payment and printed this reminder on Dec. 19th: “The *Enterprise* has not received their Christmas Turkey.” Those were the days! I doubt if the *Star Democrat* accepts poultry.

Life in Trappe

Some snapshots of town affairs from the local columns of the *Enterprise*:

“We now have two mails a day from Trappe to Baltimore leaving at 6 A.M. and at 12 M. The 12 o'clock mail goes by way of Oxford.”

“We learn with pleasure that an Express office will be established in Trappe Station this week. This will be a great convenience to our people. Now let us have that telephone line to Easton and Cambridge.” The telephone had just been invented only four years previous to this in 1879, so this is a remarkably early reference to it on the ‘Shore. Trappe would not get its first phone until about 1906.

“Three strollers made their appearance in Trappe on Saturday afternoon last, each leading a large bear. They commenced their performance in the centre of the town, and broke up the political meeting which was going on at the time.”

“We had a Hop in the Town Hall at Trappe, on Monday night. The music was furnished by the Eastford Hall Band, Oxford.”

“Notice! Some one has been shooting my pigeons. I hereby most politely and earnestly request that it not be repeated, and warn all persons from so doing. Philip Schuhmann”

“By mismanagement, the excursion train bound for Philadelphia gave Trappe Station the go by, leaving half a dozen would be excursionists, and among them the agent standing on the platform. Who is to blame?”

“The entertainment given last Tuesday by the Dramatic Association was, so far as we are able to judge, a success every way, except financially. The weather was very disagreeable and caused a slim attendance.”

“The revival services at the M.E. Church still continue with increasing interest. Twenty seven converts have been received up to date.

“News is like hen-teeth this week... Our friends will greatly oblige us by sending us any item of news.”

“A Nuisance. One day last week the commissioners put a load of fresh oyster shells in the street in front of Mr. Jesse Mullikin’s. The hot sun shining on them produced a very unpleasant smell. There has already been a great deal of sickness in this part of the town and, if such things are allowed to exist, they will cause more. While the commissioners are examining pig pens, they should also see to such things as these.” Oyster shell roads and pig pens haven’t been seen in Trappe for many years.

Maybe the good old days weren’t so good after all, unless you were the wealthy businessman Mr. Clark: “Workmen are engaged in putting up a wind-engine and laying pipes to a basin in the front yard of Mr. I.D. Clark’s residence. When completed there will be a fountain springing up in the centre of the yard. Pipes are also arranged to carry hot and cold water all through the house.” From pig pens to a house with a fountain and hot water on tap, Trappe had something for everybody.

Humor

Boys will be boys, and if the ones at the *Enterprise* were determined to have some fun, nothing not even disease or death would stop them: “There are some cases of measles in our town, the genuine article, obtained from Western Maryland, and not your “German” Measles, as they have in Easton.” Our measles are better than your measles!

And where else could you read an amusing account of a railroad fatality: "A gentleman taking his morning walk on the P. W. & B. railroad track, near Easton thought he felt something touch him from behind. The Coroner's inquest decided that it was a locomotive, propelling a train of freight cars, that brushed him off the track."

Horse Power

Perhaps the most surprising thing to read in this automotive age, is how dangerous it could be to travel by horse and buggy. We tend to romanticize it, dreaming of clip-clopping along on a fine, spring day behind a noble steed, but the truth is that sometimes horses got frightened and bit, kicked, ran away, knocked people down, turned over carriages then kicked them to pieces. They also got sick and died. One Trappe horse even managed to get itself struck and killed by lightning.

Mind you, I have nothing against horses, but everyday equine travel could be full of perils and for evidence of this I submit the following (arranged in order of severity):

"On Tuesday morning of last week Mr. E.H. Lloyd had the top of a new wagon torn completely off at Clara's Pt. The horse started and walked under a hanging limb of a tree near the wharf. It was the first time the wagon had been used."

"Rev. J.W. Grubb met with quite an accident yesterday morning. While his horse was loose in the yard, he went up behind him and smacked him on the side with his hand, the horse being suprised [sic] kicked him in the side, which knocked him down. He was unable to get up for some time. He was not seriously injured."

"Thursday afternoon as Mr. G.L. Jenkins was starting out for a ride, and while shutting the gate, the horse started off with Nettie Mullikin and Nannie Bozman in the buggy. He came through town in a brisk trot, and becoming frightened at the crowd in the street, who were trying to stop him, turned aside and ran into a lamp post. The little girls were thrown out but escaped without serious injury."

"Miss Lizzie Kemp and three younger sisters while on their way to Chancellors Point yesterday morning met with quite an accident. The horse becoming frightened begun kicking, over turned the carriage completely demolishing it. They escaped with several bruises."

"Last Saturday while Mr L H Mullikin was coming from Easton, the horses which he was driving became frightened at a traction engine on the road, and started to run. Mr. Mullikin was pulled out and run over by both wheels. He escaped with several bad bruises; the other occupants were uninjured. The carriage was badly damaged."

"Mr. Wm McNeal, a resident of Trappe district, who was working with a threshing machine in Miles River Neck, was driving in a carriage to Col. Ed Lloyd farm, Thursday evening, and when near his gate his horse shied and in attempting to check him pulled the wrong rein, guiding the horse into the ditch, on the side of the road. The carriage was overturned and McNeal thrown out, injuring him quite seriously. His back was badly bruised and head cut in several places. He succeeded in catching his horse and borrowed a carriage to return home in. He stopped in Easton at Mr Jacob William's store, for a short while. When he got in town he was not able to move his lower limbs, but could sit up and drive. His injuries may prove serious."

One might get the impression that it was almost as dangerous to travel by horse then, as it is to be on Rt. 50 on a summer's weekend nowadays in an automobile. And buggies had no seat belts.

A Hunting We Will Go...

Hunting was as popular then as it is now. What modern hunter wouldn't salivate over this account: "One day last week Messrs. McNeal and Valiant, of Royal Oak, killed one hundred and fourteen red-heads at four shots. That is the way to do it boys!"

But hunting wasn't without its dangers: "Mr. Minos Jones while out gunning for rabbits on Monday morning, his gun bursted [sic], injuring him quite seriously about the head and face." Poor Mr. Jones and his bursted gun. He should have availed himself of the services of Trappe's gunsmith, who had been running this ad for several weeks: "If you want your guns repaired or put in good order go to W.H.H. Pasterfield, also blacksmithing in all its branches." And so should have Capt. Price. The *Enterprise's* lack of a dictionary is very evident in its account of his misadventure:

"Accident. Capt. J.E. Price, while out ducking one day last week, met with a serious accident. He was in a blind on Mr. Alex Seymour's shore, when a fisherman duck [merganser] swam into his decoys, he rose and fired. When he recovered from his shot, he found himself flat on his back and feeling upward for the ground, with his nose badly skinned, and his gun brich [breech] behaved. He arose and looked for the duck, which he supposed to be dead, and to his supprise [sic], saw it flying out the creek, at the supposed rate of two miles per minute. The Captain said that he was sure that the duck would not stop between here and Sharp's Island." Apparently, ducks could have their revenge.

The boys would never know it, but the following local would be amusing over a century later: "Ducking has been fine in Dickinson's Bay for several days. Mr. G.A. Mullikin shipped thirteen pair Red-necks [sic] to Philadelphia yesterday morning. The finest lot of ducks we have seen this season." They obviously meant to say red heads, not red necks. Red necks would later be a slang term for a rough country boy and, as far as I know, it is still illegal to hunt them.

Farming

Trappe was an agricultural community, and the *Enterprise* accounts are especially interesting because farming was just beginning to be mechanized. Improved horse or mule drawn implements were making their appearance including self-binders which automatically cut, raked and gathered grain into bundles, something which previously had to be done by hand. Big steam tractors called traction engines which powered threshing machines were common during the July wheat harvest. "The sound of the steam whistle is heard on every hand." they wrote as the fields filled with the smoking, chuffing engines. Farmers everywhere were rushing to buy the new equipment, as the *Enterprise* put it: "Machine fever is the most dangerous disease now raging in Trappe."

Machinery could be dangerous (of course) and steam engines frightened horses causing accidents as we have seen. Boilers could explode causing horrible accidents and death, sparks from their smoke stacks started fires: "An outhouse belonging to Mr. I.W. Jump was set on fire last Monday by a spark from a traction engine standing in the schoolhouse yard. It was put out before much damage was done."

They also broke down in inconvenient places and the *Enterprise* complained that “The law against obstructing the streets is utterly disregarded. One night past week a traction engine which became disabled, stopped in town for repairs. it was left in the middle of the street for three hours while repairs were being made. During that time people who were passing in vehicles were compelled to drive up on the pavement there not being room in the street on either side.” Town commissioners would pass a new law banning them from the streets, imposing stiff fines of up to twenty dollars for violations.

Traction engines can nowadays be seem working at the Tuckahoe Steam and Gas Associations show in mid July.

Race Relations

The U.S. was segregated during the nineteenth century and Trappe was no exception, yet, this little town did some surprising things. In 1867, ex-slave “Nace” Hopkins helped to start a parade celebrating Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation which had freed slaves during the Civil War in the Confederate States and then in the border states like Maryland after the war. Here is their account of that Nace’s Day Parade from 1884 (Note that the word colored is used. The *Enterprise* followed the typical newspaper practice of the time in labeling African-Americans, the word colored was actually thought to be polite, although it is out of favor now.) “The emancipation was celebrated in Trappe on Saturday by the colored people. There was a good crowd in attendance. A band furnished music for the occasion, Dr. Brown, of Baltimore was present and addressed those in the afternoon, Capt. R.H. Staub spoke to them at night.”

There were problems also: “The dwelling house of George Smith a colored man living near Trappe on the road between Trappe and Hamilton, was set on fire on Wednesday night. Smith was away from home on business, and there was no one in the house but his wife and a little child. Mrs. Smith was awakened in the night by the smoke in her room, when she got up and made her way to the window raised it and jumped to the ground, got a ladder and went back and brought the child out. After arousig [sic] the neighbors, they succeeded in extinguishing the flames. This is the second attempt to burn him out.” That fire was deliberately set and people could have died.

But if there was prejudice in the area, it was not seen in the pages of the *Trappe Enterprise*. Notice in the above quote from April 4, 1883, that an African-American woman was given the title of Mrs. which was something absolutely remarkable for any newspaper to have done at that time in any part of the country, north or south.

The *Enterprise* also reported that a white man from Easton was fined \$1.00 and costs by the town police for disturbing the “colored” religious revival meeting held nearby. Trappe had a “colored” school and a “colored” church, Scott’s United M. E. Church which is still thriving as is the Nace’s Day parade. Although conditions in the Trappe area were not perfect by any means, they could also have been worse.

Steamboats

Although landlocked, Trappe was accessible to the Choptank river in three directions and was served by three steamboat landings. Steamboats were an important

part of the local economy carrying passengers and freight in the days before paved roads, cars and trucks.

“The steamer now leaves the wharf at 8:30 P.M. This makes it very convenient for peach growers, who can pick until sundown, and then get to the wharf in time.”

“Very few persons went from here on the excursion to Tolchester [a popular amusement park in Kent Co.] on the Fourth [of July]. It is said by those that went that, at first the managers refused to land them at Clara’s Point, the number being so few. The passengers persisted, and finally with much reluctance they were carried there, but were compelled to jump off, the boat not tying.”

“Last Tuesday morning being very foggy, the Minnie Wheeler, while going out the creek, ran ashore at Capt. Long’s. Her passengers were transferred to the Enoch Pratt, and the following morning her freight was taken off by the Chesapeake. She was not gotten off until Friday morning, when she was pulled off by the Chesapeake.”

“The new steamer Tred Avon, of the Choptank company, made her first trip down on Wednesday morning. While going to Kirby’s wharf, the signal was given to stop, but the engines hung and having considerable headway, she ran into the wharf. Two oak sills about 12 inches square were cut into and the floor torn up several feet. It is said that the boat was not damaged in the least.”

The Barber of Trappe

In the *Enterprise*, we can follow the escapades of Fred Paul, the town barber.

July 18, 1883: “Fred Paul, the Trappe barber was arrested last Friday by constable Jno. S. Sullivan charged with a violation of the local option law, in selling liquor to Anthony Nichols. Esq. Lloyd held him to bail in the sum of \$250 for his appearance at court.”

September 5, 1883: “I have lately made repairs and improvements in my shop for my Fall & Winter trade and greatly desire the attention of the white gentlemen. F.H. Pauls, Barber, Trappe.”

May 7, 1884: “Our barber skipped last Thursday. On account of our barber, F.H. Paul, suddenly leaving us last week for parts unknown, we are in need of a good barber, and if the right man will settle here we will guarantee him an abundance of good custom.”

June 18, 1884: “Our barber has not arrived. One is needed badly here.”

And finally, much to the relief of Trappe’s dudes, this report in the August 13, 1884 issue: “Trappe now has another barber and the young gents who have had to shave themselves for so long will be saved that trouble.”

Law and Order

Trappe had a magistrate, two Constables and a Bailiff “to keep us in subjection to the civil law” and fines could be imposed for their violation. “Three boys were up before Esquire Lloyd last Thursday on the charge of racing their horses through the streets on the Sunday evening before. They pled guilty and were fined 50 cts. and costs.” The speed limit then was 8 m.p.h., now it is 25 with a possible fine of \$75 or more. And I speak from experience having, in all innocence, once thought that I was outside the town limits on the county road, forgetting that those town limits had recently been extended.

The trooper claimed that I was going 42. Esquire Lloyd where were you when I needed you?

Wiggins the Weatherman

Certainly the most bizarre character whose name appeared in the columns of the *Enterprise* was seen in this note: "Wiggins predicts a severe storm on the 27th. Lookout for clear weather." What was going on here? Who was this Wiggins? Some research on the internet provided the surprising answer, one which would have been familiar to everyone in 1884, but long since been forgotten.

Ezekiel Stone Wiggins (1839-1910), was a Canadian astrologer and self proclaimed weather prophet who predicted in Sept. 1882, that a terrible storm on March 8, 1883 would sink vessels, submerge part of the Atlantic coast and advised that people move inland. Wiggin's storm as it came to be called got intense newspaper coverage and he became an object of scorn when it failed to appear. Unfortunately, this did not stop his predictions and later he would claim that the sun was inhabited and a second moon was responsible for cold weather. No wonder the *Enterprise* made fun of his forecasts.

Baseball!

Baseball was always popular in Trappe. Historian Dickson Preston wrote that the first recorded baseball score in Talbot County was on Sept. 6, 1867 when the Trappe Choptanks beat the Easton Fair Players 85 to 47 and Trappe's best known citizen J. Franklin "Home Run" Baker (1886-1963) was inducted into baseballs Hall of Fame in 1955.

Baseball was certainly given top priority by the *Enterprise* staff: "An exchange advises parents not to place the boys where they may meet with sunstroke- weeding the garden for instance- while the baseball season is at its height."

The game's popularity also inspired this curious challenge printed in the *Enterprise* by a Trappe area family: "The nine Todd brothers, sons of Mr. J.B. Todd, of Bolingbroke, challenge any other nine brothers in the State to play a game of baseball on the Easton grounds."

This was picked up by other papers as it was common then for newspapers to share news and a reply came a few weeks later:

"The Nine Todd Brothers Challenged. A short time ago it was noticed in the papers that the nine Todd brothers sons of Mr J B Todd, of Bolingbroke, challenged any other nine brothers in the State. A few days ago they received the following letter:-

New York, Aug. 5, 1884

To the nine Todd Brothers, of Talbot Co., Md.

In the Federalsburg Courier of the 2nd inst, we see a challenge to play a game of base ball with any other nine brothers in the State. We, the eight sons of Curtis Davis and one cousin, son of Jas H Davis, of Federalsburg, Caroline co, Md., challenge you to play a match game of base ball on the Polo Grounds in New York city date to be fixed later. The reason we select the Polo Grounds is because six of us are so situated here that it would be impossible for us to get away. Our ages are from 15 to 50. There will be a charge of admission and the gate receipts will be divided between the two clubs. The reason we have to take our cousin is because there are only eight Brothers of us, and as

he is a near relation we take the liberty of selecting him. Trusting we will hear from you as soon as convenient we remain,

Yours Respt.,
Davis Brothers
100 Barclay St., N.Y.”

So far as I can tell, the game was never played since the Davis brothers couldn't come to Easton and the Todd brothers couldn't go to New York.

Bicycles

Bicycles were also becoming popular when the *Enterprise* ran this ad: “For Sale. A Second Hand 44 inch Bicycle in good running order for \$15 cash. Apply at the Enterprise Office.”

The 44 inch bicycle was not an *Enterprise* typo. Bicycles then were the ones with the huge front wheel called high wheelers. They were difficult to ride and a tumble from one could be serious as Percy discovered. Apparently, the temptation of having one around the office was too much and his adventures with it were duly reported in the *Enterprise*: March 19, 1884: “Our Junior Editor fell from a bicycle last week and sprained his wrist.” March 26, 1884: “Our Junior Editor has retired from bicycle riding.”

Others had better success: “Four young men of Oxford visited Trappe Sunday on bicycles.” This was more of an adventure than we might think because not only were the unpaved roads full of potholes, but also nails from horseshoes.

The *Enterprise* also reported this showdown at the O.K. Corral which the horse won because its rider cheated:

“Bicycle and Horse Race- A bet was gotten up Thursday evening on a race between Mr. John Rose's little brown mare and Mr. W.C. Fountain on his bicycle, the mare to trot. The race was to come off yesterday morning on the Point road. The parties met and the start, but Rose ran his mare most of the way and Fountain gave up the race. Whenever the mare was trotting Fountain could pass her with little trouble. There is some talk of a race between Mr. Fountain and Wm. J. Marshall's mare Joe Kaley. Mr. Fountain has made a mile in 2:58 on his bicycle-

Easton Gazette.”

Many more subjects could be extracted from the *Enterprise* if space would allow it. Publication would cease in late 1885 and as no issues are known to have survived after February of that year, the last months of the *Enterprise* are lost. The boys would go on to other endeavors, Percy would even be Trappe's postmaster for a few years, but I wonder if either of them had as much fun doing anything else as they had while publishing the *Enterprise*.

These excerpts have been made from *A Trappe Enterprise Sampler 1883-1885 Selected and Annotated by James Dawson* which is available at the Unicorn Bookshop; P.O. Box 154; Trappe, Md. 21673; (410) 476-3838 www.unicornbookshop.com and also at the Trappe Town Office. It contains many more selections along with a map, rare photographs and four pages of notes. The file of the surviving issues of the *Trappe Enterprise* is available on microfilm at the Talbot County Free Library in Easton, Md.

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The *Tidewater Times* is practically a local institution and has published many great articles on Delmarva in it's 54 year history. Thanks, *TT* for letting me use this one.