



The Michigan
Daily News
Editorial Staff,
circa 1930

U-M BENTLEY HISTORICAL LIBRARY

125 YEARS OF EDITORIAL FREEDOM

It began as a tabloid serving 2,000 U-M students. One hundred and twenty-five years later, the Michigan Daily continues to serve the University while also providing an excellent training ground for journalists.

By Anna Clark, '03

This is what happens when there are no grown-ups in the room.

In 1924, a student writing for the Michigan Daily filed a report of his interview with Mahatma Gandhi—dateline, Bombay. In 1943, another student broke the news that former U-M football star Tom Harmon was missing in South America. In 1955, when the University announced the success of Jonas Salk's polio vaccine, the paper became the first in the world to print the news. In 1958, two reporters were jailed in Cuba after trying to get an interview with Fidel Castro over spring break. And in 1973, the paper reported from the capital for Richard Nixon's second inauguration; the byline, with total earnestness, was credited to its "Washington Bureau."

This is the unusually ambitious and independent college newspaper that debuted on Sept. 29, 1890,

and is now celebrating its 125th anniversary. The four-column tabloid hailed itself as a "revolution in college journalism," serving a campus with just over 2,000 students. Since then, U-M students have spent untold hours wrangling with all of the editorial, ethical, financial, design, and technology decisions it takes to publish a broadsheet five days a week. There are no advisers or appointees in the newsroom; in legendary all-night elections, the staff votes for the student editors who run the paper.

An ordinary student dedicates more than 30 hours a week to the paper while maintaining a full course load. That kind of motivation gets results. And through both its accomplishments and hard-earned lessons, the paper has been a powerful training ground for generations of journalists. Although the University no longer offers a journalism degree, an extraordinary number of alumni, including eight Pulitzer Prize winners, go on to top-tier careers in the field. (See sidebar on page 38.)



MAYNARD STORIES

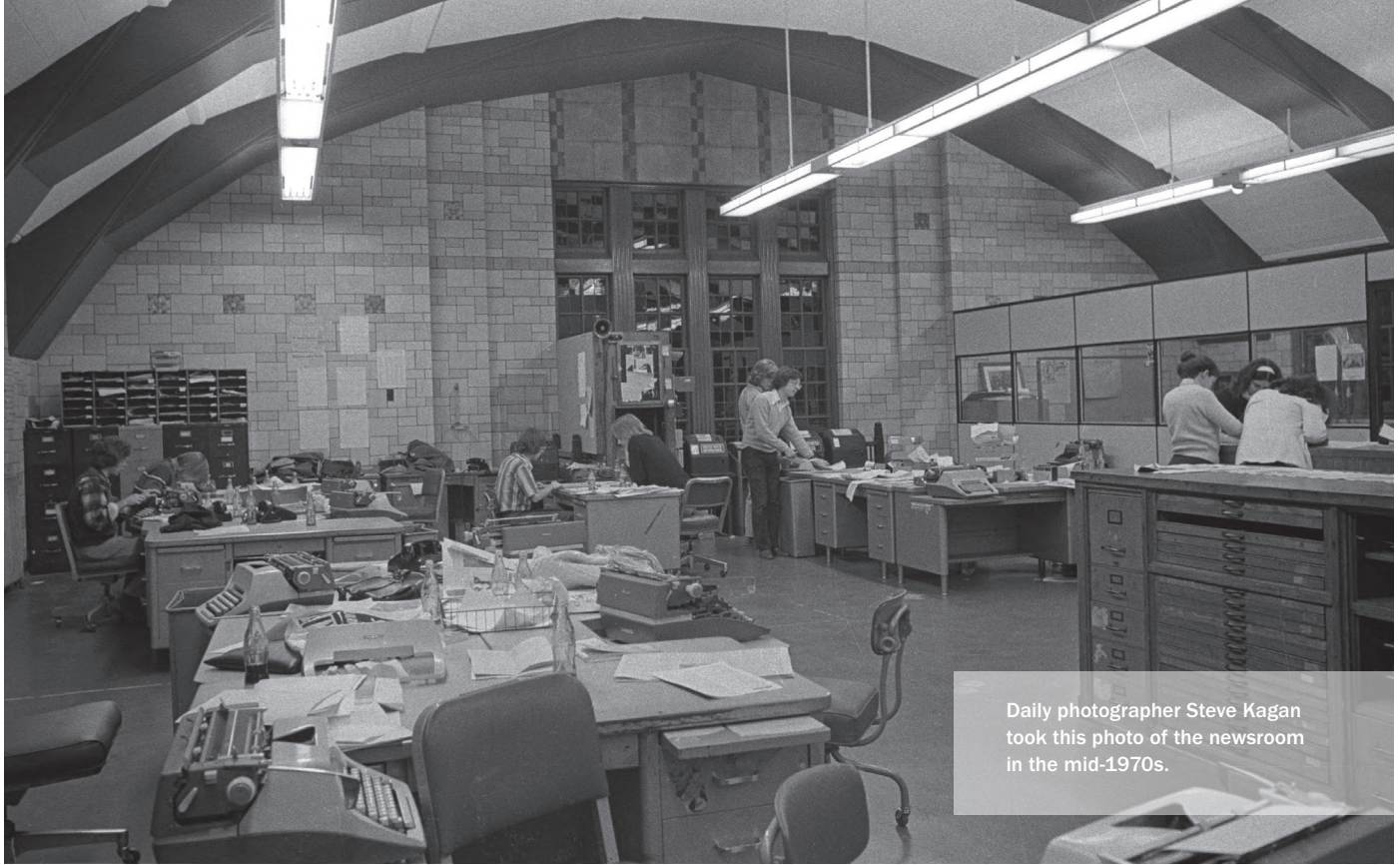
In September, the U-M Press will publish “In the Name of Editorial Freedom: 125 Years of The Michigan Daily,” an anthology edited by Stephanie Steinberg, ’11. The anthology collects newsroom stories from a wide swath of alumni, including an essay by former Daily editor Tom Hayden, ’61, which we excerpt here.

We who lived, breathed, and sometimes slept at the Daily went through an educational process that tested us, that mattered, that would remain forever in our bones. In those times, it was common to define the four years of higher education as a “parenthesis” in real life, a bubble free of any risks and consequences, a preparatory period of adulthood, which somehow would occur immediately after graduation. In a similar way, students were encouraged to acquire knowledge at a distance, by rote, objectively, without immersion or subjectivity. Neither as students nor as reporters were we allowed to permit the intrusion of feelings in our pristine observations.

At the Daily, all this was turned upside down. It is true, we were rookies in publishing an everyday newspaper, improvising and learning as we were doing it, in the spirit of John Dewey, one of the philosophical inspirers of participatory democracy, who preached of learning by doing. But that was the point. The collective practice of publishing the paper, from assigning stories in the morning to seeing the copies roll off the large web press by 3:00 a.m., was one requiring investigation, collaboration, choices, priorities, communication skills, meeting deadlines under pressure, and constant feedback from the University community, not just a professor behind a desk.

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The point of this is that if you were at the Daily you couldn’t escape the real world by living in a parenthesis or bubble. The real world came knocking when you were reporting and writing editorials every day.



Daily photographer Steve Kagan took this photo of the newsroom in the mid-1970s.

"I don't know that I even separate it from my career," says Erin Einhorn, '95, former deputy managing editor for politics at the New York Daily News. "My career really began at this paper."

THE DAILY HAS CHANGED A LOT over the past 125 years. It's no longer delivered to the residence hall rooms of subscribers for a few cents a week. Women in leadership positions are now commonplace. The in-house darkroom and printing press are gone. It even looks different: in 2007, a dramatic renovation to 420 Maynard, as the Student Publications Building that houses the Daily is known, transformed the newsroom.

But for all that, the spirit of the paper is the same as ever.

"That's one of most important gifts that working at the Daily gave you: a tremendous sense of responsibility for getting things right, on a daily basis, at very young age," says Ann Marie Lipinski, '94, who won a Pulitzer while at the Chicago Tribune for her city council investigations. She first covered council meetings as a Daily reporter in Ann Arbor.

"We were kids with our own printing press," adds Lipinski, who is now the curator for Harvard University's Nieman Foundation for Journalism and a member of the Alumni Association board of directors. "There was a tremendous sense we all had not just for the day-to-day work, but for the reputation of the institution, which is very long-standing."

That legacy is tangible in the bound volumes of the yellowing archives that are shelved in the

On the weekend of Sept. 25, the Michigan Daily will celebrate its 125th anniversary by hosting alumni for festivities including a dinner with University President Mark Schlissel and a football game. It is also launching a fundraising campaign, run by today's staff, "to continue to succeed as a publication for the next 125 years," as current editor-in-chief Jennifer Calfas puts it. And it will publish a special issue to spotlight the history of the Michigan Daily in tandem with the evolution of the University of Michigan.

In 1968, editors still worked out page layouts on paper, as in this photo by Daily photographer Jay Cassidy.





By 2011, the newsroom had changed and the newspaper continues to evolve in both coverage and technology.

PHOTOS THIS PAGE, MICHIGAN PHOTOGRAPHY

newsroom for any reporter to page through. Historic front pages line the walls, echoing the tradition for current reporters. And legendary stories get passed down to each generation of students. “You feel all this jealousy and envy for people who got sent to Little Rock to cover Central High School,” says Geoff Gagnon, ’02, former Daily editor in chief. He refers to James Elsman Jr., the Daily reporter who was dispatched in 1957 to cover the integration of that school. Elsman’s youthful appearance made it possible for him to slip into classes, making him the one and only journalist to tell the national story from inside the school. Gagnon adds: “And you think, ‘Oh shit, what are we going to get to do?’”

Gagnon, now articles editor at GQ magazine, suggests that the paper actually may be better off *because* the University doesn’t have a journalism degree. “People weren’t there because they’re interested in building their career resume, or grades, or impressing journalism faculty,” he says. In fact, many students don’t even think they’ll go into journalism; Gagnon himself expected to go to law school.

“The program is so pure because it ends up being fundamentally about the chance to tell stories and take pictures and build a newspaper with your friends every night,” Gagnon says. “It does not get any better or more real or more pure out there.”

The Daily still covers the city of Ann Arbor and the campus. Indeed, during the academic year, it is the only daily paper that publishes in Washtenaw County, and it expanded its city coverage when the Ann Arbor News faltered. It was also the first to break the news in January 2014 that the University had penalized a Michigan football player for sexual misconduct. But



these days, the Daily needs to be agile to thrive. In both coverage and technology, it is evolving. It developed a Detroit beat over the last year, covering the nearby city where the University was founded in 1817. It also created a video staff and several new positions dedicated to thinking long-term about digital journalism. It has prioritized social media, and it just completed a new website design.

By adapting to new media while keeping its values and independence intact, the paper hopes to ensure that many more generations will benefit from both writing and reading this uncommon publication.

THROUGH THE YEARS, THE DAILY HASN’T JUST REPORTED NEWS; it has also made news. Both a New York Times profile in April 2014 and a segment last summer on “The Daily Show” highlighted

In this 2011 photo, Jennifer Lee works on an article about the Ann Arbor City Council for the next day’s issue.

WINNING THE PULITZER

A plaque hanging at the entrance to the Michigan Daily newsroom honors Daily alumni who have won the Pulitzer Prize, the most prestigious award for journalists and writers in the fields of Letters, Drama, and Music. Following is a list of those former Daily writers along with the award they won and publication for which they won it.

ARTHUR MILLER, '38, HLHD'56
Playwright
Drama, 1949

STANFORD LIPSEY, '48
(with other staff)
The Sun Newspapers of
Omaha, Nebraska
Local Investigative Specialized
Reporting, 1973

EUGENE ROBINSON, x'74,
HLHD'11
The Washington Post
Commentary, 2009

DANIEL BIDDLE, '76 (with H.
G. Bissinger and Fredric N.
Tulsky)
Philadelphia Inquirer
Investigative Reporting, 1987

AMY HARMON, '90
The New York Times
Explanatory Reporting, 2008

LISA POLLAK, '90
Baltimore Sun
Feature Writing, 1997

STEPHEN HENDERSON, '92
Detroit Free Press
Commentary, 2014

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI, '94
Chicago Tribune
Investigative Reporting, 1988



Michigan Daily photographer Sara Krulwich, '72, wore distinctive floppy hats during football games. "I wanted to make it clear there was a woman on the field."

the paper's commitment to intelligent reporting. The Times spotlighted it as "a new model" in which college students are increasingly making up "for the lack of in-depth coverage" by local papers. "The Daily Show" filmed on location at Maynard Street, hilariously dramatizing how the student reporters could not be lured into publishing click-bait.

Of course, there are less honorable moments in Daily history—perhaps most infamously in 1969 when it published "McCartney dead; new evidence brought to light." The satirical story about the Beatles' Paul McCartney played a pivotal role in spreading the rumor that became an international fixation.

And then there was that time when the paper broke one of the longest-standing traditions at the Big House.

In 1968, Sara Krulwich, '72, was the first female photographer at the Daily. She was designated to receive a press pass to football games, but the pass contained this warning: "No women, children or dogs allowed on the field." While the policy had recently been softened—a dog was trained to knock a ball through the goalposts at halftime—it wasn't a joke; there were no female cheerleaders or Marching Band members on the field either.

Krulwich showed up for the first game on her 19th birthday. Former Daily photographer Andy Sacks, then working for UPI, was also there and offered to introduce Krulwich to Will Perry, the sports information director, to make sure the day went smoothly. They made their case, but Perry turned them down. "I can't do this now," he said simply.

Nonetheless, Krulwich took to the field. When three guards approached her, she pointed to her pass and said, misleadingly, that she had spoken with Perry. But the guards threatened to physically remove her from the field if she didn't

leave. Before they resolved the dispute, the game began. Sacks told Krulwich to kneel and begin shooting as if nobody had told her she couldn't. She did just that. The guards' bluff was called: they didn't want to haul her away in front of 100,000 witnesses and a corps of photographers who would capture the unseemly incident on film.

Days later, Krulwich received a letter from Perry apologizing for his "dogmatic approach."

"I guess we are breaking all sorts of tradition around here this season (we'll even have gal cheerleaders in basketball)," Perry wrote.

In retrospect, Krulwich says, she shouldn't have waited until game day to introduce herself to Perry. But she enjoyed her role as a pioneer. Later, during her acclaimed career as a New York Times photographer, Krulwich hung Perry's old letter on her wall.

Fearlessness of another sort was on display four decades later when, in the wake of Sept. 11, Gagnon sent reporters who were scarcely old enough to vote to cover stories around the world.

"Hell, we were a college newspaper," says Gagnon. "But it didn't occur that we wouldn't or couldn't cover this big, faraway story. We were like, 'Yeah, we're going to New York and Washington and Pennsylvania and Pakistan!' We sent people everywhere." It didn't register as absurd at the time, he says. But, looking back, he's thankful for the audacity.

"It remains the hardest and probably most rewarding job I've ever had in journalism," Gagnon says. "I think about it a lot. It's crazy the stuff that kids at the Daily can pull off." **M**

Anna Clark, '03, is an independent journalist living in Detroit. She has written for The New Republic and NBC News online, among other publications. She is a former Fulbright fellow in Kenya and, in 2012, founded Literary Detroit.