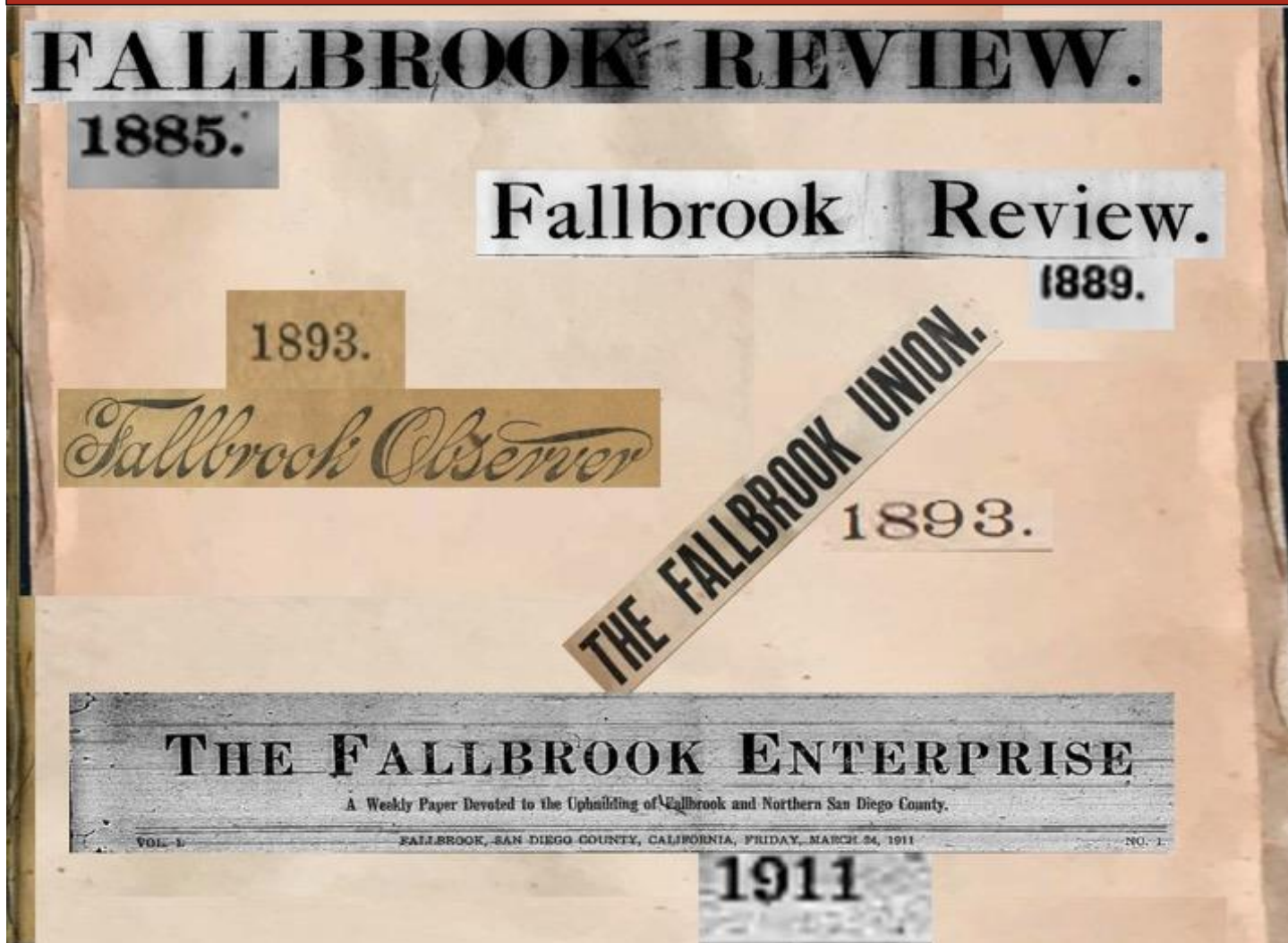


The Historian

A Quarterly Publication of the Fallbrook Historical Society

Spring 2021

EARLY HISTORY OF NEWSPAPERS IN FALLBROOK



There are 135 years of newspaper history in Fallbrook with some gaps of publication in the early years. These journals are an invaluable record of Fallbrook's history. The Historical Society continues to research the different newspapers, the timing of them, and their editors.

In 1885, the West Fall Brook townsite was being surveyed. One livery stable, and a hotel were already open for business. Two churches and a temperance union were holding regular meetings. Merchants were buying town lots to build shops. A larger hotel and a school were being planned. There was a strong desire to have a town newspaper. The nearest newspaper was the San Luis Rey Star more than 10 miles away by horseback.

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The Neff family had a large homestead one mile south of town. They persuaded their son, who worked as a newspaper printer in Sacramento, to come to Fallbrook. A printing press was set up in one the few existing buildings, possibly in Abbotts Hall above the livery stable. This building, better known today as the Oddfellows, is still standing on Beech Street.



In 1885, Ben Neff's *Fallbrook Review* may have been printed in an upstairs corner of this 1882 building on Beech St. Originally called Abbotts Hall, it was a livery stable downstairs with meeting space upstairs.

Fallbrook Review 1885-1886

Fallbrook's first newspaperman was 27-year-old Benjamin Neff. The first issue of the *Fallbrook Review* was April 30, 1885. Social news, advertisements, legal notices, and regional rumors filled the pages. The *Review* pages were 6 columns wide and printed each Thursday. Subscriptions were \$2 a year (in advance) or 75 cents for 3 months. There were less than 200 households in greater Fallbrook in 1885. To make ends meet, 19th century newspapers typically operated a printing business between the weekly publications.

WEST FALLBROOK, CAL., THURSDAY, AUGUST 20, 1885.

FALLBROOK REVIEW.

PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY

BY

BEN A. NEFF.

TERMS:

Subscription--

One Year (IN ADVANCE)	02 00
Six Months "	1 25
Three Months "	75

Advertisements--

One Column, 1 month	10
One-half Column, 1 month	6
One-quarter Column, 1 month	3 50

Star (*) Reading Notices, 5 cents per line per week.

Special Rates upon application.

POSTOFFICE ADDRESS:

HOWE,

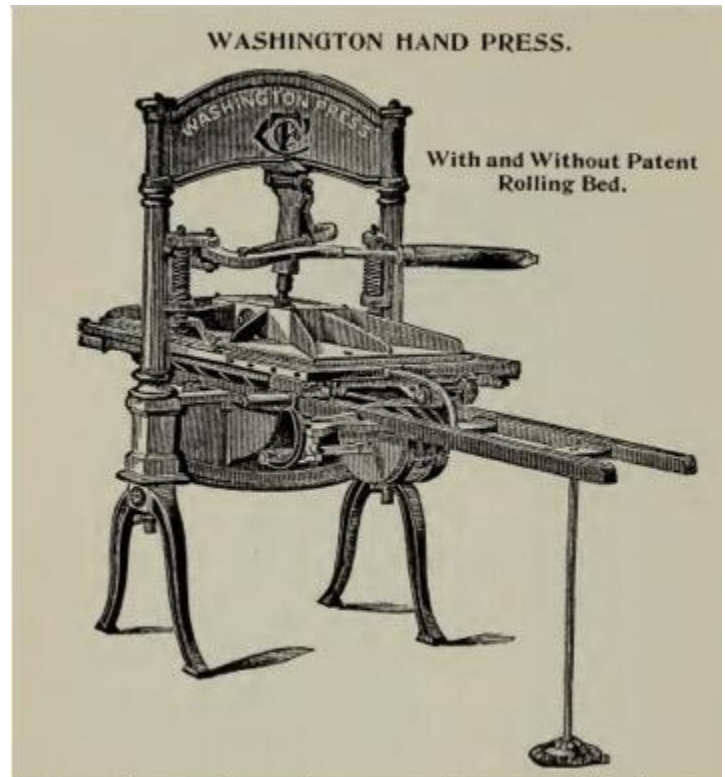
San Diego Co., Cal.

Early edition of the *Fallbrook Review*. Howe Post Office was at the train station in Santa Margarita Canyon. The *Review* may have been printed in the Oddfellows Hall which is straight up the hill following today's DeLuz/Pico Rd.

Printing in those days was a demanding, physical job. It involved setting the type, inking the plates, and turning the wheel to press the pages evenly, one page at a time. The *Fallbrook Review* was only 4 pages per edition, 2 sheets folded, printed front and back. Being the only reporter and the printer; plus selling advertising, subscriptions and collecting payments was a long week. Ben Neff lasted at it for only 2 years. In 1887, young Ben married Mamie Tomlins of the Tomlins Hotel family and took a printing job with the San Diego Union for a steady paycheck and regular work hours. The *Fallbrook Review* was taken over by J.W. Cheatham, a Fallbrook promoter and real estate agent. The printer G.F. Van Velzer was enticed to come to Fallbrook for a good price on 10 acres of land from Ben's younger brother, Millard Neff. Cheatham then hired Van Velzer.

Fallbrook Review 1887-1890

Gilbert Francis (G.F.) Van Velzer "rented" Cheatham's newspaper and became the publisher of the *Review*, which now had 300 subscribers. The popular Van Velzer family made Fallbrook their home for the next 21 years. A quiet man, G.F. was always listening and jotting down notes for the *Review* in a small notepad. The newspaper was a family affair. His wife and sons helped to get the weekly newspaper out. In 1900, after 3 years, G.F. retired to his Fallbrook farm to be a fruit grower, also becoming caretaker for the 20 acres of orchards of his new neighbor, Rev. William Pittenger.



G.F. Van Velzer used a Washington Hand Press to publish the *Fallbrook Review* 1887-1890. This was typical technology in the 1880s-90s.



G.F. Van Velzer (with beard) surrounded by his family in Fallbrook in 1901. Sitting front left, is his son Francis Clare (F.C.) The Van Velzers lived in Fallbrook for 21 years (1887-1907) on today's Rocky Crest Rd. usually involved with printing newspapers. F.C. later wrote they had moved away because business was slow in Fallbrook, and the town of Beaumont, Riverside County recruited his father to come print the *Beaumont Gazette*.

Fallbrook *Union* 1892-1893

In January 1892, Van Velzer relaunched his newspaper as the Fallbrook *Union*. The *Union* is a remarkable 12 pages, following a familiar pattern of reporting on the social and civic news of Fallbrook country, plus strongly advocating for a Fallbrook irrigation district. The *Union* lasted only 22 months. G.F. took his wife on an extended trip by railroad to see the Chicago World's Fair and sold his paper to a printer who was running from trouble.



This building on the right at 212 N. Main Ave was the original Masonic Hall in Fallbrook. Dr. Bowers Fallbrook Observer was printed in the lower right in 1893-1894.

Fallbrook *Observer* 1893-1894

Dr. Stephen Bowers renamed the *Union* as the Fallbrook *Observer*. The *Observer's* office was in the original Masonic Hall on N. Main Ave, a building that still stands today. When Van Velzer returned to Fallbrook, Bowers hired him to print the *Observer*. Bowers' time in Fallbrook lasted just 6 months, before he sold the newspaper to Montgomery Moulton and left town.

Fallbrook *Observer* 1895-1896

Montgomery M. Moulton was a 21-year-old Spanish-American War veteran. The *Observer* lasted just 2 years under Moulton. When the *Observer* actually stopped publication is not certain. Despite often being away working other jobs, the politically ambitious Moulton continued to list himself in directories as publisher of the *Observer* through the year 1900. Moulton likely would have needed Van Velzer's assistance to put out a weekly newspaper, if he actually did. Yet Van Velzer's son Clare, in his autobiography "In the Year 1900 A Nickel Bought A Lot", clearly describes helping his father print a newspaper in 1902 and later. There are no known surviving copies of a Fallbrook newspaper after 1896.

Whenever Van Velzer stopped printing, there would not be another Fallbrook newspaper for years until a new publisher came along.



Stephen Bowers, publisher of the Fallbrook *Observer* during 1893-94. He was a preacher and amateur archeologist. A controversial figure he stayed less than a year.

Fallbrook *Enterprise* 1911-1995

Henry Voorhees (H.V.) Alexander came from San Diego and founded the Fallbrook *Enterprise*. The first issue was March 1911 and just 4 pages. Economic conditions were improving in Fallbrook after the 1896 national depression. The Smelser family had arrived and founded Citizens Commercial Bank. They started the Commercial Club, a forerunner of today's Chamber of Commerce. Alexander created the *Enterprise* to be an unabashed supporter of the virtues of Fallbrook, loudly promoting coming economic opportunities. Alexander would retire in 1919 but the *Enterprise* would go on uninterrupted for the next 84 years.

And that's another story.

Tom Frew

References:

Manuscript by G.F. Van Velzer and autobiography by his son F.C. Van Velzer.
Electronic copies of the Fallbrook *Review*, *Union*, *Observer*, and *Enterprise* newspapers.
Huntington Library rare newspaper files.
Biography of Stephen Bowers by Wallace E. Smith.
San Diego County directories

OUR CURATORS

The Fallbrook Historical Society is proud to announce the Curators of our Museums:

Main Museum and Gift Shop – Pat Saunders

Pittenger House – Bev McDougal

Mike McGuire – Ford Room

Tom Sullivan – Donald J. Rivers Interpretive Center “The Barn”

Fallbrook Reche Schoolhouse – Scott Atkins

and

Rebecca Tindall – Chair of the Past Perfect Asset Tracking Software Project

THANK YOU ALL!

While we are waiting for approval from the County to open the Museums . . .

The Fallbrook Historical Society Museums
Can Come Into Your Home and Bring Educational Fun for the Kids
And Wonderful Historical Stories for Everyone
Complete with Vintage Photos, Music and Newspapers

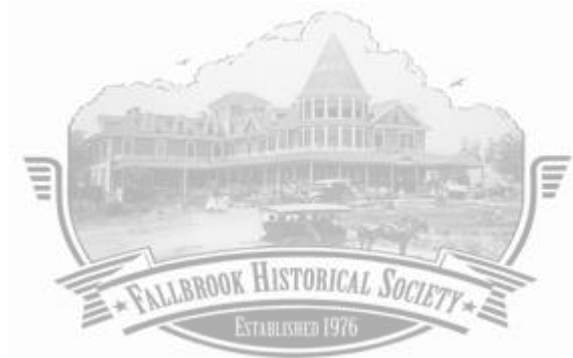
Visit at www.fallbrookhistoricalsociety.org



Things you can do on the webpage:

- Read the fascinating historical stories of the early settlers and all-important agricultural pioneers of Fallbrook
- Read the biographies of Pioneers of the Year, Vintage Businesses of the Year, Members of the Year
- Learn about the first schools in the area and the teachers and administrators who got the educational system in place
- Read about the rich railroad history of Fallbrook and how it influenced the development of the town
- Join, renew, or upgrade your membership.
- Make a donation; Purchase commemorative tee shirts
- Ask a question of our Historian; Research your family's Fallbrook history

The Fallbrook Historical Society's mission is to bring history to life by educating the community and others about Fallbrook's rich heritage



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