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Old Marion newspapers get new life online

By Mike Conley

With the click of a mouse, you can now read old newspaper accounts of the severe floods from 1916 and 1940 and the deadly strike at Marion Manufacturing Co. from 1929.

Patti Holda is the librarian who operates the Abe Simmons Genealogy and North Carolina History Room at the McDowell County Public Library in Marion. She has been working on a newspaper digitization project with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The new project involves taking old newspapers from communities across North Carolina and making them available online. This was made possible by a grant to the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center at UNC-Chapel Hill, the State Library of North Carolina and the UNC-Chapel Hill University Library.

The county library was asked to submit some old newspapers to be a part of this online effort.

“I selected some of our oldest and some of the papers from specific time periods (October 1929, flooding in 1916 and 1940 for example),” said Holda. “They couldn't choose all papers, but may be able to do more in the coming year.”

The newspapers contain old articles about historic subjects, such as the 1916 presidential election, as well as vintage ads.

Not all of the newspapers originally submitted for digitization were chosen for the project. This could possibly be because the quality of these microfilmed papers may not have been as good as that of the more recent papers, according to Holda.

The papers available online are The Marion Progress from 1916 and 1940 (during periods of severe flooding throughout the county) and from 1929 (the period before and during the deadly strike at Marion Manufacturing).

More papers should be available online within the next year. Dates submitted for consideration include the Marion fire of 1894 (where nearly the entire downtown burned down (The Marion Record). A few issues of three publications from during and after the Civil War could be available online too at a later date. They include

The Western Enterprise of 1862, The Mountain Mercury of 1863, The Lamp Post of 1881 and The Marion Messenger of 1896 and 1898.

You can now view online the select number of digitally copied vintage McDowell County newspapers by visiting <http://digitalnc.org/institutions/mcdowell-county-public-library>.

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