



# YEARS OF INNOVATION



## From modest paper to modern media

By Robert Nolin  
STAFF WRITER

Started on a lark and published on “vegetable wrapper” by an educator with a decidedly broadminded concept of spelling, the journalistic forebear of today’s Sun Sentinel first rolled off a humble press on March 14, 1911.

It was called The Daily Herald and was the first daily paper (a weekly Herald was also available) published in Fort Lauderdale. It consisted of four undersized pages printed “on vegetable wrapper as a stunt,” wrote publisher William M. Heiney, a high school principal. Hardly a source of real news, it listed the day’s land sales for speculators.

Its existence was brief, and it ceased publication at an unknown date. But that early publication was the seed that blossomed into a company whose reach ultimately spanned the full communications multi-verse of print, Internet, television, radio and cell phone.

Two weeks after Heiney published his little daily, Fort Lauderdale was incorporated as a town.

The fledgling community was soon host to another weekly, the Everglades Breeze, swiftly renamed the Fort Lauderdale Sentinel. “This town one day will be a sentinel to the Everglades,” pronounced owner Col. George G. Mathews, a former state legislator and diplomatic attache to Brazil who started the Sentinel with \$400.

The paper’s slogan, “Gateway to the Everglades,” mirrored the pioneer community’s early emphasis on farming to the west, rather than tourism to eastern beaches.

Mathews and his family printed the paper from the first floor of their apartment. On March 31, 1911, the Fort Lauderdale Sentinel was designated second-class material with the Post Office, meaning it met the government’s criteria for a newspaper.

While chronicling 100 years of the dramatic growth of its home city, the publication that ultimately would become the Sun Sentinel experienced a tumultuous history of its own. There were fires, deaths, hurricanes, political clashes, a digital explosion and even bankruptcy.

A year after the town incorporated, a massive fire raged through its ramshackle downtown. In an attempt to stop it, citizens dynamited the Weekly Herald’s building.

Mathews was elected mayor in 1913, and 11 years later he converted the Sentinel into a daily. His daughter Sarah was city editor and son Bob, 12 at the time, helped set type.

No circulation figures are available from those early days, but the paper must have turned a profit. In 1925 Mathews sold it for \$140,000 to Ohio newspaper publishers Leroy and W.J. Galvin, brothers who also purchased its longtime rival, the Weekly Herald. They consolidated both publications into The Daily News and Evening Sentinel.

But the Galvins didn’t remain publishers for long. In early 1926, they sold their papers to Horace and Thomas Stilwell for a whopping \$480,000, more than twice what they had paid a little more than a year earlier. But then, it was the height of the region’s land boom.

The Stilwells called their new acquisition The Daily News. The name would last for decades; the owners,

### DAILY NEWS

#### KNOWN DEATH TOLL OF HURRICANE NOW 15 IN LAUDERDALE

With Homeless and Injured Cared For Relief Workers Bend Efforts To Avoid Infections and Establish Sanitation

Fort Lauderdale, Florida, September 26, 1926.

The death toll of the hurricane that struck the region on September 24, 1926, has now risen to 15 in the city of Fort Lauderdale, according to a report issued today by the health department.

The victims are: Mrs. J. H. ...

**Sept. 20, 1926:** After a devastating hurricane that ultimately killed hundreds in the region, the paper published after only a two-day lapse. The hurricane also halted the land boom, causing hard times for the area and the newspaper.

only three years. The first of their woes was a late 1926 hurricane that devastated the region. The Daily News didn’t publish for two days. When it did, it was a miniature four pages printed on a Lake Worth press.

The Stilwells sold the paper, circulation about 2,000, to Chicago insurance executive R.H. Gore Sr. for a bargain-basement \$75,000 in 1929. It was April Fool’s Day, but the low price was no joke: Fort Lauderdale’s big land boom had gone belly up.

Gore’s paper became The Fort Lauderdale Daily News, an evening publication. Thirty-four years later he sold it to the Tribune Co. for a healthy \$18 million. In the intervening decades he presided over the staggering growth of his publication — and adopted city — with equally staggering hubris. He dedicated his paper to “progress and civic upbuilding” and wasn’t afraid to wield its power, or a flowery pen.

“The News will strike the blow when the blow is necessary to still the hand of any who would attempt to place barriers between us and our worthy goals,” he wrote.

A short, pudgy cigar chomper, Gore was the crusty publisher personified. After a yearlong stint as territorial governor of Puerto Rico (he had to be escorted from the island after a dispute with President Franklin D. Roosevelt), he was forever known as the Governor.

Gore dressed down subordinates and disbursed compliments as sparingly as he did wages. He opposed the desegregation of Fort Lauderdale beach and refused to report on it.

He also grew prize-winning orchids and collected beer steins. He gave millions to charity, including a black college scholarship, and once paid the medical bills for a favorite reporter who drank himself to death.

“One of the greatest assets a man can have is a reputation for eccentricity,” he once said.

During Gore’s time, newspapers spoke a different language. Blacks had the term “Negro” or “Negress” appended to their names. Women were “ladies” whose first names were often “Mrs.” Men were typically identified by first and middle initials rather than a given name.

Content, too, reflected a simpler age. One 1920s front-page story reported

how Edwin C. Brodie (apparently drunks were fully identified) was arrested for driving drunk with his pet bulldog. “I’d had some words with my wife,” Brodie told the judge. “The dog and I left to avoid trouble and I drank some.” Brodie got 30 days, along with his dog, which the paper did not name.

The Governor established a morning paper, The Sun-Sentinel, in 1960. Three years later he sold his publications to the Tribune and retired. He died in 1972 at age 86.

The paper, along with the region, kept growing. Circulation hit 176,000 in 1974. By then the paper was operating out of new headquarters on Las Olas Boulevard.

A fire in the pressroom there killed a worker, Joseph Lee Mallard, 62, in 1980. Nine years later the paper opened a massive production facility in Deerfield Beach.

The late ’80s saw circulation milestones of 350,000 on Sunday and 275,000 daily. In 1990, the paper moved into the 21-story downtown New River Center it still occupies.

Two years later the evening paper, now called The Fort Lauderdale News, published its final edition. Over the years, bureaus sprouted up in Washington, D.C., Tallahassee, West Palm Beach, Delray Beach, Sunrise, Hollywood, Weston, Miami and even Havana, Cuba.

In 1997, Sunday circulation peaked at 420,000 and the paper estimated it reached a million readers.

The Sun-Sentinel added South Florida to its name in 2000 to identify with the region it covered.

The following decade saw the stunningly rapid rise of the Internet, which upended the way newspapers delivered news and accelerated industrywide declines in circulation and advertising.

Changes happened fast in recent years: SunSentinel.com adapted to technology with constant upgrades to its website, utilizing videos to help tell stories.

In fact, readers no longer even need a newspaper or computer to access stories — they are now available on cell phones through installable apps.

The Sun Sentinel dropped South Florida from its nameplate, as well as the hyphen between Sun and Sentinel, but recently South Florida returned to the masthead.

In 2007, billionaire investor Sam Zell bought the Tribune Co. — owner of the Sun Sentinel, Orlando Sentinel, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, 23 television stations and several other papers — for \$8.2 billion. A year later the company entered into bankruptcy, from which it’s expected to emerge this year.

Still, the Sun Sentinel continued to nurture its fleet of media outlets, each with its own website: the Spanish language El Sentinel, Forum Publishing Group community newspapers, South Florida Parenting, the Jewish Journal, City Link, Teen Link, City & Shore magazine and WSFL-TV.

Over 100 years a small-town paper had become, as corporate leaders now put it, “a media and business company that happens to publish newspapers.”

And that’s about as far from a “vegetable wrapper” as you can get.

Staff researcher Barbara Hijek contributed to this report.

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March 26, 1929: R.H. Gore buys the Fort Lauderdale Daily News for \$75,000.



Sept. 6, 1953: First Sunday Daily News edition is published.



June 6, 1963: Gore sells the Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel to Tribune Co.



March 10, 1985: A combined edition of the Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel. The Fort Lauderdale News ceased publication in 1992.



Today: The Sun Sentinel continues its mission of serving the South Florida community in print, online and on mobile devices.