The focus of my reading is on the current state of journalism. If you’ve been following the demise of newspapers or the layoffs of reporters and editors, you won’t be surprised to learn we are in a time of disruption, when good reporting—and reporting of local news in particular—is rapidly dwindling.

“Upstart” online news services such as The Bedford Citizen are stepping up to fill the void and those of us who are working to cover town governance and community events feel we’re being successful.

But Bedford may be the exception. Throughout the U.S., there are plenty of “news deserts” where the local press has disappeared and nothing substantive has replaced it. It’s a given that community journalism encourages voter turnout and more government accountability and trust.

The Future without a Hometown Paper?

For an overview of what’s happening in journalism today, turn to a special report by The New York Times on August 4, 2019, A Future Without the Front Page.

Aside from cuts to mainstream news outlets, many small and “niche” market publications have had to lay off staff in the past year or two. Business Insider writer Benjamin Goggin estimates 3,200 people have lost their jobs so far this year in a media landslide. One such is ThinkProgress, the independent editorial arm of the Center for American Progress, whose CEO is Bedford native Neera Tanden. Other media outlets like Buzzfeed, CNN, Huffington post, McClatchy, Vice Media, and Gannett have either laid off staff or shut down altogether, as advertising revenues have dried up due to the rise of Google and Facebook.

The Consequences of ‘Horse Race’ Reporting: What the Research Says

As we gear up for the 2020 election, it’s worth pondering an article urging more attention to policy issues and less to the election as a horse race.

Denise-Marie Ordway writes, “When journalists covering elections focus primarily on who’s winning or losing — instead of on policy issues — voters, candidates and the news industry itself suffer, a growing body of research has found.”

Source: Journalist’s Resource, a project of Harvard Kennedy School’s Shorenstein Center and the Carnegie-Knight Initiative. Read more here: https://tinyurl.com/y6qt8nva

An Issue that Won’t go Away

A big question confronting every news source today – and every writer- is “how do you know if what is reported is true? How about photos? They can be altered so easily, how is a reader to decide what is “true”?”

“The Times’s Research & Development team is exploring ways to make the origins of journalistic content clearer to news audience”

“In a time of heightened political polarization and widespread social media use, the prevalence of misinformation online is a persistent problem, with increasingly serious effects on elections and the stability of governments around the world. In addition to false statements published as fact in text and photos that have been manipulated or republished out of context, instances of manipulated video are now on the rise. How should news organizations respond to this crisis?” The first project is based on photojournalism because photographs can be so easily manipulated and disseminated through social media.

The Times is using blockchain technology to establish the “provenance” of photos it publishes. The article goes into depth on blockchain technology (heretofore associated mainly with development of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and having a rather unsavory reputation.) Read The Times article here:

The MIT Technology Review also weighs in on this project, in this article which begins: “Blockchain technology is at the core of a new research project the New York Times has launched, aimed at making “the origins of journalistic content clearer to [its] audience.

“The Times has launched what it calls The News Provenance Project, which will experiment with ways to combat misinformation in the news media. The first project will focus on using a blockchain—specifically a platform designed by IBM—to prove that photos are authentic.” Read the MIT article here:

And on the Lighter Side

From the esteemed Columbia Journalism Review, AP Stylebook Hyphen Rule Creates an Uproar – “THE SKY HAS FALLEN! The end is nigh! How can we possibly go on?”

That was the reaction to a small change in The Associated Press Stylebook that has unsettled many editors and writers. The change? AP is calling for no hyphen between some compound modifiers, like “first quarter touchdown.” The AP writes: “We updated our hyphen guidance this year to say no hyphen is needed in a compound modifier if the modifier is commonly recognized as one phrase, and if the meaning is clear and unambiguous without the hyphen. One example is first quarter touchdown.”

Note: The Bedford Citizen uses the AP Stylebook as the basis for its own style guide.