Benjamin Towne: The Precarious Career of a Persistent Printer

Benjamin Towne is remembered as the publisher of America’s first daily newspaper, which he brought out in Philadelphia in the spring of 1783. However, the fact that he was able to print a newspaper at all during the War for Independence testifies to persistence in the face of continuing adversity worthy of at least equal note.*

Towne was a man of fascinatingly fluid political views; his little newspaper, the Pennsylvania Evening Post, shuttled repeatedly from one end of the Revolutionary political spectrum to the other during the war. From its founding early in 1775, it was firm in its opposition to England until British soldiers occupied Philadelphia in the fall of 1777. Towne, remaining in Philadelphia, then converted his newspaper into a warm supporter of the occupying force. Subsequently, when the British marched away in June, 1778, Benjamin Towne remained on hand, with an ostensibly “patriotic” Evening Post, to welcome the Americans back.

This printer has been a bit of a puzzle to historians, who have noted that he was “attainted” of treason in 1777, but that the charge was later dropped. It has also been asserted that Towne “published his newspaper undisturbed” even after the Americans regained Philadelphia. If true, this apparent lack of restraint would be difficult to reconcile with Leonard W. Levy’s generalization that the press was nowhere free during the Revolution.5

* This study was supported in part by the Research Committee of the Graduate School, University of Wisconsin, from special funds voted by the State Legislature.

2 Thomas, Ibid.
4 316
There is, however, evidence that Towne was violently disturbed by a mob on at least one occasion, although he was ultimately allowed to continue publishing his newspaper. The simple act of publishing, of course, does not mean that a printer felt free. Towne was not accorded anything approaching our present day understanding of freedom of the press; it seems quite possible that he was allowed to continue simply because none of his contemporaries felt that he mattered very much.

Towne was a native of Lincolnshire, England, where he had learned the printing trade before coming to America. About 1769, he became a journeyman for William Goddard, a Whig who published the Pennsylvania Chronicle. Goddard's financial backing came from two arch-conservatives, Thomas Wharton, Sr., and Joseph Galloway. Before long, Wharton and Galloway were much displeased with the independent-minded Goddard, who had dared to print the "Farmer's Letters" of rival politician John Dickinson. In May, 1769, Galloway and Wharton withdrew their support, but not before they had loaned £526 to Benjamin Towne and had set him up as Goddard's partner. This arrangement was a failure, for Goddard and Towne quarreled continually, and Towne quit the partnership in February, 1770.4

During the years 1770-1774, Towne apparently supported himself by working for Philadelphia printers. It is possible that he may have had other skills with which also to make a living, for printer Robert Aitken's book of daily transactions contains an entry for "Benj. Towne, CopperSmith" on February 6, 1775.5 After having set himself up as a printer in his own shop, Towne brought out the first issue of his Pennsylvania Evening Post on January 24, 1775, the fourth English-language newspaper in the city, the others being Benjamin Franklin's former property, the Pennsylvania Gazette,6 the Bradfords' Pennsylvania Journal,7 and John Dunlap's Pennsylvania

6 In 1775, the Gazette was published by William Hall, David Hall, Jr., and William Sellers.
7 The Journal, published by Colonel William Bradford and his eldest son Thomas, had appeared in Philadelphia since 1742.
Packet, all weeklies. Towne broke local precedent by establishing the city's first evening publication and, later, its first tri-weekly. His Evening Post was a small "quarto" publication, 12½ by 9½ inches in size, and usually ran to four pages in its first years.

At that time, Philadelphia was the leading city in the American colonies, and, in the early months of 1775, the scene of the greatest newspaper activity on the continent. Three days after the first issue of Towne's Evening Post appeared, James Humphreys, Jr., started his weekly Pennsylvania Ledger. In line with virtually inviolable newspaper tradition, this publication proclaimed itself to be "Free and Impartial."

Next appeared, on April 7, 1775, the Pennsylvania Mercury. Published by Enoch Story and Daniel Humphreys, this was a Tory paper which received financial backing—as had Goddard's by then defunct Chronicle—from Thomas Wharton, Sr., and Joseph Galloway. Galloway hoped that this newspaper would be, according to his lights, "a free Press, to recall the deluded people to their senses." Story and Humphreys claimed that their journal was started because of the "Solicitation and Encouragement of several Gentlemen of Reputation." These "Gentlemen," however, were in the sharp-tongued Joseph Reed's view, "a little, dirty, despicable party endeavoring to sow dissension." On December 31, 1775, the Mercury was destroyed by fire; Enoch Story later claimed that the blaze had been kindled by "the infatuated populace."

A. M. Lee has speculated that Towne was supported by silent partners when he established the Post, and has thought that it was quite possible Wharton and Galloway were behind him. However, Wharton and Galloway were helping to finance the Mercury in 1775,
and Towne's silent partners, if any, must have been other merchants or politicians.

Although Philadelphia was America's largest city in 1775, competition must have been extraordinarily keen in the printing, binding, bookselling and stationery businesses. Eleven printers operated in the city during 1775, and six published newspapers. In addition to the shops which did printing, there were eight booksellers.

The three new Philadelphia newspapers were certainly born in troubled times, for the outbreak of fighting between American and British soldiers in Massachusetts brought out the Philadelphia mob. In the fall of 1775, for example, a party of militiamen seized Tory lawyer Isaac Hunt and hauled him about the city in a cart, stopping at the home of Hunt's friend, Dr. John Kearsley, where amidst rioting Kearsley received a bayonet wound in his left hand. Although he was not tarred and feathered by the angry mob, his house was damaged because of his "insolent behavior." While being dragged around the city in a cart, Dr. Kearsley had persisted in "taking off his Wigg with his bloody hand and crying out here is a Whigg repeatedly."

Perhaps because of disturbances like this, Towne steered his little newspaper with particular care during 1775. But in 1776, the Evening Post, together with the other Philadelphia newspapers, took part in the bitter fight over the adoption of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776. Using the devices of popular meetings and conferences, and ultimately holding a constitutional convention, the more militant popular leaders succeeded in taking control of Pennsylvania away from the conservative legislature, and in forming a new, Revolutionary government.

The Provincial Convention which drafted the Constitution of 1776 first met on July 15. This body quickly proved to be more than a con-

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15 Charles Evans, American Bibliography (New York, 1941), V, 454-455; Clarence S. Brigham, History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1680-1820 (Worcester, Mass., 1947), II. These newspapers were the Journal, Gazette, Packet, Post, Mercury, and Ledger. Henry Miller also published his German-language Staatsbote in Philadelphia at the time.

16 Ibid.


stitutional convention, for it also acted as a legislature until its ad-
journment on September 28. During its two-and-one-half month
existence, the Convention passed ordinances releasing some debtors
from jail,\(^\text{19}\) defined treason,\(^\text{20}\) and even passed a sedition law.\(^\text{21}\) This
last measure provided that "if any person or persons within this
State shall, by advisedly speaking or writing, obstruct or oppose, or
endeavor so to do, the carrying on" of the war, they could be held to
"give security" for their good behavior. In addition, if a person was
thought really "dangerous," two justices of the peace could order him
imprisoned for the duration of the war.

Once the Constitution was published in the *Pennsylvania Journal*
on September 10, conservatives were convinced that their mistrust
of the Convention had been justified. "Scipio," as one conservative
writer dubbed himself, complained that "the Convention have risen,
and without consulting the prejudices, habits, or even inclinations
of their constituents, have forced a government upon us big with
anarchy and slavery."\(^\text{22}\)

Benjamin Towne's *Evening Post* devoted a large amount of its
space to discussing Pennsylvania's new Constitution. On September
17, a writer signing himself "E" supported the expanded suffrage
provided by it, arguing that all persons who paid taxes should vote,
"unless a tax in the future is laid on theft, adultery, counterfeits,
hypocrites, and other grosser crimes." "F," however, retorted that
the Convention had acted wrongfully, because it had been chosen to
form a "frame of government," not to legislate. He saw as dangerous
the Convention's ordinance which empowered justices of the peace
to put a suspected enemy to American liberty in jail for the duration.\(^\text{23}\)

Towne printed many more remarks critical of the Convention and
of the Constitution of 1776 without hindrance. James Humphreys,
Jr., publisher of the *Pennsylvania Ledger*, was not so fortunate.
Historians have called the *Ledger* a "Tory newspaper," and have
said that it was "forced to suspend" on November 30, 1776.\(^\text{24}\)

\(^{19}\) *Pennsylvania Packet*, Aug. 13, 1776.
\(^{20}\) Ordinance of Sept. 3, 1776, printed in *ibid.*, Sept. 10, 1776.
\(^{21}\) Ordinance of Sept. 12, 1776, *ibid.*, Sept. 17, 1776.
\(^{23}\) *Evening Post*, Sept. 17, 1776.
prisingly, the *Ledger*’s criticisms of the new Constitution and of the Revolutionary movement in Pennsylvania were no stronger than those which appeared in Philadelphia’s other newspapers.25

The reason for the *Ledger*’s suspension and Humphreys’ flight from Philadelphia seem to lie in the activities of Benjamin Towne. Isaiah Thomas, the Massachusetts printer and historian, who was a contemporary of Towne and Humphreys, had a highly creditable explanation for Humphreys’ departure. According to Thomas, Towne, using paper said to have been borrowed from Humphreys,26 published a letter signed “A Tory” in mid-November, 1776. In this letter it was stated, “I have been long anxious to see a printing press in this city subservient to the purposes of Lord and General Howe.” The *Ledger* was described as a newspaper “in which is pompously displayed large extracts from the Tory New-York Mercury.” This attack on Humphreys ended with an exhortation: “now it becomes all friends of arbitrary government” to aid the British forces.27 Isaiah Thomas concluded that Humphreys, “not knowing what might be the consequence of these assaults, in those times of commotion,” fled Philadelphia.28

The *Evening Post* continued on, by all outward signs as loyal to the cause of the Revolution as any of the Philadelphia newspapers. Having had a hand in sending one competitor out of Philadelphia, Towne apparently hoped in the fall of 1777 that the invasion of the city by British troops might improve his business position even more. At any rate, he remained in the city.

On September 16, John Adams wrote in his diary, “No newspaper this morning. Mr. John Dunlap of the Packet has moved or packed up his types.”29 While Towne sat snugly in Philadelphia, the other local newspaper printers had suspended operations about September 10 and were moving to the back country.30

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27 *Evening Post*, Nov. 16, 1776.
28 Isaiah Thomas, II, 265.
30 Brigham II, 932–942.
Towne himself suspended publication of his *Evening Post* for about two-and-one-half weeks, until October 11, 1777. If he then had visions of having the Philadelphia newspaper field to himself, he was soon disappointed. Less than a month later, James Humphreys, Jr., returned and re-established his *Ledger*. This time, the *Ledger* was openly a Tory newspaper.  

On January 29, 1778, an advertisement in Towne’s paper notified Philadelphia of the arrival of more competition, printer James Robertson from New York. Robertson first opened a stationery store, featuring, in addition to quills and paper, such items as “tortoiseshell picktooth boxes,” “ladies tortoiseshell smelling boxes,” and ass skin memorandum books. On March 31, he published the first number of his *Royal Pennsylvania Gazette*, which lasted only twenty-five issues.  

Towne seemed little ruffled by the change in military control of Philadelphia. The fortuitously ambiguous motto he had chosen for his newspaper remained the same: “The finest spectacle, and the firmest defence, is the uniform observation of discipline by a numerous army. Archidamus.” One change he did make, however, was the reduction in the price of the newspaper from fourpence to threepence per copy. This lower price was no doubt prompted by the arrival of good hard money in the pockets of British troops.  

Towne settled down to printing an orthodox Tory newspaper. His first issue under the new order contained a declaration by “his excellency sir William Howe, K.B., general and commander in chief &c. &c. &c.” that inhabitants of Pennsylvania had nothing to fear from British soldiers. General Howe also promised pardons to any “men in arms against his Majesty” who would once more swear allegiance to King George. Subsequent issues carried propagandistic claims, arguing that “the pains taken by the leaders in the present rebellion, with a view solely to the promotion of their own ambition, and the establishment of their intolerable tyranny, is not to be paralleled in history.” The *Evening Post* also printed the rumor that Benjamin

31 Ibid., 940.
32 *Evening Post*, Jan. 29, 1778.
33 Brigham, II, 951.
34 *Evening Post*, Oct. 11, 1777.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., Jan. 3, 1778.
Franklin, then an American envoy in France, intended to seek asylum in Prussia, which would most certainly turn him over to England "as soon as America is subdued." Although Towne printed a faultlessly Tory paper throughout the occupation, Humphreys apparently received most of the civil and military printing patronage.

When it became known that the British troops were going to leave Philadelphia, Towne's Tory competitors quickly disappeared. Humphreys' last issue of his Ledger was published May 23, 1778; the last issue of Robertson's Royal Gazette appeared just three days later. Meanwhile, Towne suspended his newspaper from May 20 to June 11, 1778, perhaps because of a shortage of paper. When he resumed the Evening Post, he kept its price at threepence until after the British soldiers departed on June 18. Outwardly undaunted by the arrival of American troops, he raised the price of his newspaper to fourpence an issue, just as the city was changing hands.

His recent activities, however, had not passed unnoticed, for he soon learned that the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania had named him on a long list of persons as traitors to the state. He even had the somewhat bizarre chore of publishing the Council's list. Thus, it seems that he must have been of some use to the state government and to the Continental Congress, because other printers were slow in returning to Philadelphia. Towne printed several other proclamations of the Supreme Executive Council and of Congress in his newspaper. In his attempts to keep up with the rapid depreciation of the paper currency then in use, he was forced to raise the price of his paper, first to eightpence a copy, and later to ninepence.

While Towne kept his press working in this uncertain atmosphere, with a charge of treason hanging over his head, he also had to print a humiliating "HINT to the TRAITORS and ... TORIES" signed by "Casca." Casca directed Towne and others like him "to lower your heads and not stare down your betters with angry faces.

37 Ibid., Jan. 6, 1778.
38 Evans, V, 401-403.
39 Brigham, II, 933, 940, 951.
40 Evening Post, June 20, 1778.
41 Ibid., June 25, 1778.
42 Ibid., July 2, 1778.
43 Ibid., July 6, 1778.
44 Ibid., July 16, 1778.
For you may be called upon to answer for your impertinence to the Whigs, and your treachery to this country." \(^{45}\)

Towne also gained further notoriety when the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon, president of Princeton, wrote a widely published *Recantation . . . of Benjamin Towne*. Witherspoon ridiculed the printer, and put these words in his mouth: "I turned fairly round, and printed my *Evening Post* under the protection of General Howe and his army." Witherspoon also had Towne say, "I hope the public will consider that I have been . . . a coward from my youth, so that I cannot fight—my belly is so big that I cannot run—and I am so great a lover of eating and drinking that I cannot starve." \(^{46}\)

In his ticklish position with the Revolutionary government of Pennsylvania, Towne published a number of articles urging severe punishment for Tories: "It is truly mortifying to every honest citizen, to see the streets of Philadelphia swarming, like flies upon a carcase, with murderers, traitors, spies, and thieves, impudently scurking about our coffee house, and every other place of public resort, to collect intelligence, and gather the sentiments of the Whigs. . . ." The writer of this, who signed himself "Astrea de Coelis," feared that the laws of Pennsylvania were too lenient, because "every man is to be deemed honest till convicted by trial." "Astrea de Coelis" saw this legal safeguard as a technicality which might "save many a scoundrel from the gallows," and urged formation of a citizens' group to collect evidence against traitors. Whether civil authorities requested aid or not, such a group could operate "for the support of the civil magistrate in every lawful measure, thereby to prevent mobs and tumults. . . ." \(^{47}\)

Not more than a month after the British soldiers had left Philadelphia, Towne's newspaper was full of advertisements and seemed to be prospering. His issue of July 25, 1778, for example, carried twenty-three advertisements, which took up the front and back pages of his four-page paper. \(^{48}\) Some of these advertisements and much of his business was soon siphoned away with the return of other printers, but the treason proceedings were ultimately called off. \(^{49}\)

\(^{45}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{46}\) Isaiah Thomas, II, 410-414.

\(^{47}\) *Evening Post*, July 18, 1778.


\(^{49}\) Thomas Lynch Montgomery, ed., *Pennsylvania Archives, Sixth Series* (Harrisburg, 1907), Forfeited Estates, Inventories and Sales, XIII, 477.
By the fall of 1778, Towne was apparently feeling more at ease, and may have believed that he had won support from a party of powerful men. In any case, he began printing heavy-handed attacks written by members of the conservative or “Republican” faction against the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776. “An Associator” asked: “what measures ought to be adopted against men among ourselves, who have established a government formed on a constitution inconsistent with the principles of liberty?” This writer claimed the constitution’s “most dangerous tyranny” was that there was only one branch of the legislature, and that government by a single legislative body was as dangerous as government by a single man. Using the politician’s time-honored appeal to history, “An Associator” claimed that “Your own countrymen, it will be wrote, prepared you for the reception of that yoke to which your open and avowed enemies could not bend your neck.” The men governing Pennsylvania were termed “weak and wicked men, who are seeking their own private emolument. . . .”

By midsummer of 1779, newspaper attacks on Thomas Paine and upon the touchy supporters of the 1776 Constitution, the “Constitutional Society,” brought trouble for Towne. Whitehead Humphreys, a Philadelphian of conservative political views, wrote a series of articles under the pseudonym of “Cato,” viciously attacking Thomas Paine. Paine, in evil humor because he had just been discharged from his job as secretary to Congress’ committee on foreign affairs, must have looked like fair game. “Cato” asked: “Who was an Englishman? Tom P——. Who was a Tory? Tom P——. Who was made secretary to the committee of foreign affairs? Tom P——. Who betrayed state affairs? Tom P——. Who maintains Tom P——? Nobody knows. Who is paid by the enemy? Nobody knows. Who best deserves it? Tom P——.”

50 Evening Post, Oct. 12, 1778.
51 Ibid., July 9, 1779. Men who did not like Thomas Paine—and there were many—often made dark references to past Toryism on Paine’s part. One who may have helped spread this story was his former employer Robert Aitken, for whom Paine had worked as a kind of editorial assistant. See Adams, II, 29. Any attempt to untangle Pennsylvania politics from Congressional politics here would result in over-simplification. The complexity is suggested by the fact that Paine, while associating with the Constitutional Society, was also active in bringing charges of wartime profiteering against Robert Morris and Morris’ associate Silas Deane. E. James Ferguson discusses the activities of Morris and his associates in The Power of the Purse (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1961).
A week later, Paine signed his own name to a threatening message addressed to “Cato”: “If the author chuses [sic] to submit himself to be suspected for a lying incendiary scoundrel . . . welcome; but unless he gives up his name, or the printer for him, the one or the other will meet with a treatment different to what they expected.”

Accusations that Paine had been a Tory in 1775 were renewed by a writer who signed himself “A Friend to Cato and to Truth.” This writer also sneered at Paine’s threats, asking: “Pray did not your shoulders ache, at the recollection of past flagellation, when you threatened the author of Cato, or the printer with your vengeance?”

Cato’s next article, published July 24, 1779, continued the needling of Paine and his supporters both in the government of Pennsylvania and in Congress. Paine was told that the public was aware of the source of his writings against profiteers in Congress: “We know whence they took their origin, and how you gleaned them up, the precious crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table.”

Cato added taunts about Paine’s inability to keep a secret, which had cost him his job with Congress. This last collection of insults, coupled with other barbs which “Cato” and his friends had published in the *Evening Post*, led to action.

On the evening of July 24, sympathizers of the radical Constitutional Society, headed by the noted artist Charles Willson Peale, dragged Benjamin Towne to their meeting and demanded the identity of “Cato.” After a noose was placed around his neck, Towne felt obliged to name Whitehead Humphreys as the author, and a mob set out for Humphreys’ residence.

Humphreys was not home, but a member of the mob bravely clubbed Humphreys’ sister when she opened the door, cutting her forehead. About 10 o’clock that night, Humphreys boldly walked through the mob, swinging a cane borrowed from a friend. Fearing that the rioters were about to seize him, he darted into his house, slamming and bolting the door. Although his enemies forced open the lower part of the front door, Humphreys managed to keep them out,

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53 *Evening Post*, July 16, 1779.
54 Ibid., July 22, 1779.
55 Ibid., July 24, 1779.
and subsequently brandished a cocked musket at them from an upstairs window. According to his account, he told the mob that “the first man who attempted to force my door, I would instantly put to death,” adding “The argument of the cocked musket had great weight, and they fled precipitately away, in a very laughable manner. I perceived that the ringleaders of these deluded men were all acquainted with the quickstep on their retreat; col. John Bull . . . Alexander Boyd . . . Charles Wilson [sic] Peale, the painter, and William Bonam, the tallow chandler and soap boiler, were the respectable personages who conducted this assault.” If the rioters retreated they also returned several times to trade insults with Humphreys, who finally agreed to meet a committee of them at the coffee house next morning.56

The morning session worked to Humphreys’ advantage. “Cato’s” publications against Paine were read, and enough of Humphreys’ friends showed up to deter any hotheads on the self-appointed committee from violent acts. As Humphreys put it, “several gentlemen having explained the liberty of the press, and clearly demonstrated that it ought not to be restrained, I was delivered out of the hands of a lawless banditti. . . .”57

While Whitehead Humphreys was hotly composing still another attack on Thomas Paine, Paine retaliated in the Pennsylvania Packet with a request that Humphreys add these words to anything he might present to a printer for publication: “This is published by the same person who inserted several libellous publications under the signature of ‘Cato’ in Benjamin Towne’s Evening Post of July, 1779. . . .” Paine’s next phrase suggests that the great penman of the Revolution had a one-sided notion of freedom of the press, and that the mobbing of printer Benjamin Towne bothered him not at all, for he wrote that Cato’s publications were “so infamously false that the author or carrier of them, in order to avoid the shame and scandal of being known, tied the Printer down to such strong obligations to conceal him, that nothing but a halter noose could extort it from him.”58

57 Evening Post, Aug. 2, 1779.
58 Pennsylvania Packet, July 31, 1779.
Humphreys, still seething over the attack on his house, took particular issue with Paine on the question of a free press. "The liberty of the press," Humphreys wrote, "has always been considered an impediment to the execution of bad measures . . . but why doth Thomas Paine . . . use his utmost influence and efforts to destroy this most invaluable privilege?" After calling Paine a "scribbler" and an "insect," Humphreys referred to Paine's last attack in the Packet: "I am infinitely obliged to Thomas Paine for his consent to publish, especially as he has threatened and brought a printer to confession by the halter. There being now no danger, I recommend the following lines to his perusal,

'Great mastiffs only have the knack
To throw the bear upon his back:
And when the ugly brute is thrown
Mongrels will serve to keep him down.'

The mobbing of Whitehead Humphreys touched off repercussions which reached into Congress. Edward Langworthy, delegate to Congress from Georgia, had been staying at Humphreys' house the night of the riot. Langworthy at first believed that the mob meant to injure him, and sent a frightened letter of protest to Congress, asking for protection. The matter was referred to Congress' board of war and was only allowed to drop after John Bull and Charles Willson Peale informed Congress that Langworthy's charges were "groundless, erroneous, and unjust."60

Printer Benjamin Towne was more careful after the night of the noose, a caution shared by many persons in what they said or did in Philadelphia during the last months of 1779. Soaring inflation and scarcity of food produced severe tension, and serious mob violence—including the so-called Battle of Fort Wilson—was directed against merchants and conservative politicians suspected of wartime profiteering.61

By early 1780, Towne was in financial trouble. His little newspaper became even smaller, and appeared with scarce a pretense of

59 Evening Post, Aug. 2, 1779.
60 John Bull and Charles Willson Peale to Congress, Sept. 18, 1779, in Burnett, IV, 3447–3457.
61 See Brunhouse, 75–76, 97.
regularity. For example, issue number 643 was printed on the two sides of one sheet of small "quarto" paper. The next issue did not appear until ten days later, and again consisted of only one sheet of paper. Towne's paper struggled to survive. Perhaps to assure his readers that he had remained patriotic from one week to the next, he advertised that he "would be much obliged to ladies and gentlemen, for copies of such American LIBERTY songs as he has not yet printed." By September, 1780, Towne advertised for "HAWKERS, boys and men willing to hawk this paper . . . ," suggesting that sales on a subscription basis, the normal eighteenth-century newspaper circulation practice, would no longer support the Evening Post. Somehow he hung on, although surviving issues indicate that the Evening Post appeared very irregularly after 1780.

Little is known about it as a daily newspaper, which it became in the spring of 1783, apparently with its issue of May 30. It continued to appear as often as six times a week into August. Only two issues of the newspaper remain for 1783, however, and only twenty-three issues from 1784 have been preserved. The last one which has been found is dated October 26, 1784. It has been said that Towne was reduced to "hawking" the last issues of his newspaper through the streets, shouting "All the news for two coppers."

Charles M. Thomas has suggested that the Evening Post died because its printer's "conduct made him no permanent friends." Old printer Isaiah Thomas disliked Towne, although he knew him to be a good workman. Isaiah Thomas wrote that Towne was "a bon vivant, but he did not possess the art of accumulating and retaining wealth." After the collapse of his newspaper, Towne apparently carried on with his printing business until his death in Philadelphia in 1793.

62 Evening Post, Jan. 1, 10, 1780.
63 Ibid., Jan. 29, 1780.
64 Ibid., Sept. 12, 1780.
65 Lee, 40. Lee noted that the June 17 issue was number 922; the other surviving 1783 issue, for August 22, was numbered 973. "During this period of nine weeks and four days, therefore," wrote Lee, "an average of five papers per week plus three others evidently appeared."
66 Charles M. Thomas, 612.
67 Ibid.
68 Isaiah Thomas, II, 266.
His side-changing during the Revolution may well have cost him the chance to establish America's first successful daily. That achievement was soon to be scored by his Philadelphia rivals, John Dunlap and David C. Claypoole, whose *Pennsylvania Packet* was made a daily on September 21, 1784. Towne could not maintain the commercial and political connections necessary to remain in business as a successful newspaper publisher. He never managed to secure more than a few odds and ends of the lucrative public printing business, and a study of the output of other Philadelphia presses from 1778 to 1783 suggests that Towne had, at best, a shoestring operation.  

More persistent than principled, Towne nevertheless did publish the first daily newspaper in America. Perhaps he should also be remembered for the episode in which Thomas Paine's overzealous friends placed a "halter" around his neck. This terrorizing of a printer became political ammunition for Pennsylvania's conservative or "Republican" faction, which protested that the treatment given Towne was a violation of the freedom of the press.

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69 Evans, VI, *passim.*