History of Newspapers in the Northern Territory

Newspaper publication in the Northern Territory began with the survey of the Port Darwin region in 1869. The first newspaper published in the Northern Territory was the last edition of the *Moonta Herald*, originally produced in manuscript form on board the *Moonta*, a 655 ton barque, during the voyage that carried Goyder and his survey team to Port Darwin in 1869. The six issues were subsequently republished for posterity in Adelaide by the *South Australian Register*.

Although published in Adelaide, *The South Australian Advertiser* (1858-1899) and *The South Australian Register* (1839-1900) are very important sources of information relating to the early survey and settlement of the Northern Territory. Both newspapers describe the early exploration and settlement of the region following the annexation of the Northern Territory by South Australia in 1858. Both newspapers had a number of Northern Territory correspondents after 1870 that provided a regular series of despatches from Palmerston, Southport and the Pine Creek goldfields. Both newspapers also regularly published material relating to the Northern Territory from the South Australian Parliament. The early editions of both newspapers, along with a number of early Northern Territory newspapers, are available online through Trove; an initiative of the National Library of Australia: [http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper](http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper).

The *Northern Territory Times and Government Gazette* was set up in Adelaide by a consortium registered as The Northern Territory Newspaper and Telegraphic Agency Company Limited. Edward Meade Bagot was one of the Directors and John Fairfax Conigrave, formerly of the *South Australia Register*, was the Secretary (a position he also held with the Adelaide Chamber of Commerce). In August 1873, the South Australian Government gave the consortium a distinct promise that, ‘in the event of a respectable newspaper being started they will use the same as a Government Gazette until such time as they establish their own’. The printing press was shipped to Port Darwin on the *Gothenburg* and the first edition was printed in a government store in Smith Street, on 7 November 1873 by George Thompson Clarkson. Richard Wells was editor until his death in the wreck of the *Gothenburg* in 1875.

An office and printery was later established in Mitchell Street, at one time adjoining the office and printery of rival newspaper, the *North Australian*. At various times, the *Northern Territory Times and Government Gazette* was edited by a succession of local business identities, including storekeeper and businessman Joseph Skelton, who was editor between 1877 and 1884. Local merchant, businessman and politician Vaiben Louis Solomon, owned and edited the paper between 1885 and 1889 before becoming our first sitting member in the South Australian Parliament (for further biographical details refer to the *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*; citation below).

The *North Australian* was printed and published in Smith Street, Palmerston from 1 June 1883, by RO Echlin. On 13 September 1883, George Washington Mayhew became the sole proprietor and printer of the newspaper until 5 March 1886, when a partnership was formed with Charles James Kirkland. The *North Australian* was incorporated with the *Northern Territory Government Gazette* in 1889 and in 1895, the partnership between Mayhew and Kirkland was dissolved. Mayhew carried on the business until 1897, when he was forced to retire due to ill health. Kirkland again took over the newspaper until it was taken over by Walter Bell, EJ Foster and Fred Thompson in 1914. The *North Australian and Northern Territory Government Gazette* amalgamated with *The Northern Territory Times* in 1890 under the ownership of Mayhew and Kirkland. The newspaper continued as the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* until 1927, when the title was shortened to the *Northern Territory Times*. An amalgamation with the *Northern Standard* occurred in 1932.

The *Northern Standard* was published between 1921 and 1955. Essentially the voice of the Darwin branch of the Australian Workers Union, the paper came to be associated with the radical politics and trade union activism of the 1930s. A concerned Federal Government had made plans for a rival newspaper to be established in Darwin in the early stages of the Second World War, however, the plan was abandoned following the evacuation of Darwin in 1942. The *Army News*, published in
Darwin by the Northern Territory Printing and Press Unit between 1941 and 1946, became the main source of public information in the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory Administration moved to Alice Springs following evacuation of Darwin after the first bombing raid on 18 February 1942. The Administrator, Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott returned to Darwin in July 1945, followed by the gradual return of the civilian population in 1946. The *Northern Standard* resumed publication in Darwin on 31 May 1946, boldly stating in an editorial that the *Northern Standard*, ‘does not pretend, as do most organs of the free press to be neutral in the battle of life, and to present an unbiased view of current affairs. We are strongly prejudiced in favour of the workers and small business men, as against Vestey’d interests’.

The Federal Government, still holding grave concerns regarding the ‘communist-controlled’ *Northern Standard* approached Canberra based journalist Don Whitington in 1949, with the idea of establishing a rival newspaper. Whitington enlisted the aid of Eric White and local printer John Coleman to form Northern Territory News Services Ltd in 1950. The office and print room was located in what was left of the old ‘Tin Bank’ in Smith Street. The newspaper, titled the *Northern Territory News*, was first published as a weekly in Darwin on 8 February 1952 on a clapped-out Wharfdale press. Jim Bowditch, former editor of the *Centralian Advocate*, was appointed to the staff in 1955 and served as editor between 1956 and 1973.

Coleman soon severed his ties with the *Northern Territory News* to concentrate on his own commercial printing business and Whitington and White sold their shares in the newspaper to the Swan Brewery in 1959. Rupert Murdoch’s News Limited purchased the *Northern Territory News* in 1960 and it became a daily newspaper in 1964. A Saturday edition was introduced in 1966 and the *Sunday Territorian*, originally edited by Gary Shipway and Assistant Editor Frank Alcorta, was launched on 7 October 1984.

Prior to 1971, the sole town council in the Northern Territory was the Darwin Town Council, which replaced the Palmerston Town Council in 1915 and was abolished at its own request in 1937. Eventually a Darwin Municipal Council was established in 1957, which became the Darwin City Council in 1981. Town councils were established in Alice Springs (1971), Tennant Creek (1978) and Katherine (1978). These regional centres were among the first outside of Darwin to have a regular local news service. The first of these was a roneoed newsheet titled *The Dead Heart*, printed in Alice Springs by Les Penhall, Fred Gubbins and Janet McArthur in the Administration Hostel between August 1946 and March 1947. This newsheet evolved into the *Centralian Advocate*, which was first published in Alice Springs on 25 May 1947 as a bi-weekly newspaper. Jim Bowditch, later editor of the *Northern Territory News*, was the first editor.

The *Tennant Creek Times*, started by Len Kittle as a weekly newspaper for the ‘advancement of the district’, was published between 25 May 1956 and 19 December 1957. The *Tennant Times*, also a weekly newspaper, was published between 18 July 1975 and 3 November 1978 by the local branch of the Apex Club. The name was changed to *Tennant and District Times* at around the time that it was purchased by Christine Afianos in 1978. The newspaper is currently edited by her daughter Jasmin Afianos.

The *Katherine Informer* was a weekly regional newspaper begun by local identity Sylvia Woolfe in 1972. The name was later changed to the *Katherine Advertiser* and published weekly between 1979 and 1989. A monthly newspaper, the *Katherine Herald*, was briefly published in 1983. The *Katherine Times*, a weekly newspaper begun by local residents Vince Fardone and John McDonald in 1983 is still in publication, despite being inundated by over three metres of water during the 1998 floods.

Newspapers in other regional areas of the Northern Territory became more viable as closer settlement of regions outside Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine became a possibility after self government in 1978. The Palmerston City Council was incorporated in 1981 and has had several weekly and monthly newspapers, of which, the *Palmerston Sun* has been available since 2000. The Litchfield Shire Council was established in 1981 and is served by the *Litchfield Times*, which was first published in 1985. The town of Jabiru, established in 1984 was and has had a
weekly newspaper, the *Jabiru Rag*, since 1982. A Northern Territory Government initiative to turn twenty growth towns into regional hubs has created a further demand for community information. The Northern Territory Library currently subscribes to the following newspapers: *Alice Spring News*; the *Arafura Times*; *Centralian Advocate*; *Katherine Times*; *Litchfield Sun*; *Northern Territory News*; *Palmerston Sun*; *Sunday Territorian*; *Darwin Sun*; *Tennant and District Times*; *Territory Regional Weekly* and the *West Arnhem Wire*.


- *Army News* (Darwin, NT: 1941 - 1946)
- *Moonta Herald and Northern Territory Gazette* (NT: 1869)
- *North Australian* (Darwin, NT: 1883 - 1889)
- *North Australian and Northern Territory Government Gazette* (Darwin, NT: 1889 - 1890)
- *Northern Standard* (Darwin, NT: 1921 - 1955)
- *Northern Territory Times* (Darwin, NT: 1927 - 1932)
- *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* (Darwin, NT: 1873 - 1927)

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