

Sons of the American Revolution

Newsletters and Periodicals Handbook

Why Have a Newsletter?

Why does the SAR place so much emphasis on publications? Do the larger, more successful chapters publish because they are large or are they large because they publish? Is there a correlation between a local chapter's success and the quality and frequency of its publications? Taking the answers to these questions seriously is probably the single most important step in influencing your chapter's attainment of the goals and objectives established by both the State Board of Managers and your own Board of Directors.

There is a definite need for contact among our members. There is a distinct obligation on the part of a local chapter's leadership to inform the membership as a whole of a chapter's activities, goals, and achievements. We all know that many of our supportive members find it difficult or impossible, for any number of reasons, to attend chapter meetings. Without written communication received on a regular basis, these men would receive nothing, and may feel no obligation to continue membership in the organization and be one of those individuals who drops membership when the dues notices are sent.

We all share a basic need to communicate and exchange ideas, and the more often we do, the better our chances of timely implementation of those ideas. The most important reason of all, however, is that, through our written communications we are united into one, strong fraternity of compatriots.

The publications also maintain a history of the accomplishments of the organization for future generations or can be used as recruitment tools to new members or interested potential SAR members.

A survey of highly successful chapters disclosed a definite relationship between the quality and frequency of their various written communications and other areas of achievement. Larger membership rolls, better meeting attendance, and higher levels in all areas of achievement were directly proportional to the quality and frequency of chapter publications.

The reverse side of the coin is all too apparent. Many members have been the instances where chapters have atrophied, where membership has dwindled and where extinction has been threatened, simply through lack of communications. Fortunately, a number of dying chapters have been resurrected simply and only through the efforts of one compatriot armed with nothing more than a determined will and a typewriter or computer.

It is therefore obvious that your efforts with various forms of written communication will have a positive effect on your chapter's operations, achievements and growth. In this day and age, it is easy to send out newsletters at little cost digital or electronic media avenues like CDs, DVDs, email, web pages, or others. While most of the following discussion focuses on local SAR chapters in its examples, these recommendations could be adapted and applied to newsletters at any level of the SAR organization.

Preparation

The proper selection of a format for your chapter's newsletter poses a multi-faceted issue. Consideration must be given to a number of things. Every aspect of the future publication should be carefully considered in detail. Title, size, layout, frequency, and cost of publication are only a few pieces which should be studied. Everything you wish the publication to be and accomplish should be thought out beforehand. You should establish a fixed and clearly identifiable format while building into that format a flexibility which will allow the newsletter to change and expand in the future.

This careful study of the various aspects of the proposed publication will give it both a clearly identifiable personality and an ability to change. This is the most important single step in any form of communication.

Title

The name of your chapter's newsletter is vitally important and should be selected with critical care. A good title must reflect not only the contents of the publication it labels, but the attitudes of those who will read it. The title should be one which will identify your chapter to the exclusion of all others.

You might wish to include a word from your chapter's name. Sometimes however, this approach is difficult. Perhaps your chapter is composed of members from an area represented by a certain symbol which will, in turn, indicate the principles espoused by your newsletter. Each community, city, and state has its own animal, flower, and slogan. Perhaps one of these will prove beneficial in your newsletter's title.

You might wish to use one of the many words associated with the SAR as a whole, or with the nation itself. Perhaps your chapter is composed of men living in an area near the site of a famous Revolutionary War battleground or identifies with a particular individual or group of individuals who struggled for our freedom.

Whatever title you select, it should be held up to long and careful scrutiny. The format and content of the newsletter may change over the years, but the title will usually remain consistent. It must have a solid- and timelessness which can endure. Ask yourself:

- Is it a title applicable to the present as well as the future?
- Does it indicate the tone and content of the entire publication?
- Does it reflect the spirit of your chapter's membership as well as the spirit of the SAR as a whole?
- Is it clear, precise and easily understood?

By way of a warning, we suggest that "cute" or humorous titles should be used only on "cute" and humorous publications. Certainly, a chapter's newsletter may contain bits of humor or less than one hundred percent serious observations from its members, but the overall tone of the publication should be an example of overall meaning to the SAR as espoused in our national mission and goals. Examples of potential newsletter titles include "The Arkansas Patriot," "The Minuteman," "The Florida Patriot," "The Piedmont Piper," "The Long Rifleman," and "The Defender."

Paper Size

Eight and one half by eleven inches is considered the standard size for American stationery. When used for a newsletter, an 8 1/2" x 11" page easily accommodates other items such as reports, letters, and brochures which have previously been printed or typed on other sheets of standard size paper. Some SAR chapters are using the 11" x 17" ledger-sized paper and folding it for larger amounts of space. Some chapters which use this standard size prefer to fold it in half to create an 8 1/2" x 5 1/2" format. Some chapters have published their newsletters on legal-sized paper (8 1/2" x 14"). No matter what size, folding format, or column decisions your chapter finally lands upon, there are advantages and drawbacks to each option that will have to be weighed before proceeding. Paper size can always be adjusted or reconsidered later on should issues arise.

The size, card stock, and costs may also prove prohibitive, depending upon other factors. If you are operating on a limited budget and concerned primarily with communication rather than physical size or beauty, standard-sized 8 1/2" x 11" paper is easiest, conveniently sourced, and usually the least expensive choice.

Newsletter Makeup, Layout, and Content

Although these three elements go hand-in-hand, they are frequently misunderstood and confused with one another; therefore, definitions might be in order.

“Makeup” is the overall pattern of any publication. It involves the placement of item B before item C and after item A. One publication’s makeup may indicate a list of newly elected officers before an announcement of awards. Another publication may do the opposite. Makeup involves placement within the overall publication.

“Layout” refers to exactly how an individual page or pair of pages is presented to the reader. One layout will have a picture in the upper right corner of the paper and the copy explaining that picture under it. Another layout might have the copy beside the picture. Still another might want to devote all of the left hand page to the picture and all of the right hand page to the copy. The placement of visual elements such as photographs, drawings and copy on a page or pair of pages is the layout of those pages.

“Content” refers to all within the publication. It might mean six photographs and thirty inches of copy, it might be referred to as a listing of subtitles. Content is not only what appears in the table of contents but the pictures and word blocks as well.

Makeup, layout and content are separate and distinct but must work together. Allied and in mutual cooperation, they create the format of your publication. The way these elements are handled determines the harmony or discord of your publication.

At this point, let us concentrate on content. The top priority must always be given to forthcoming local SAR meetings. Announcements like these should always be your first and most important news item. All possible details should be given. Remember the old journalism schools Five Ws and an H (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?). Include answers to them all in mentioning your chapter’s next meeting. Subsequent items can include, but certainly need not be limited to, such topics as committee reports, new member comments, the chapter’s last function, etc. Remember that anything faintly to do with your chapter or its members is a possible item for your newsletter. A member may have married or received an award; someone might have a genealogical question; a local event might have been co-sponsored by the SAR, DAR, or other community genealogical or historical society; and someone else might have a respectful disagreement with some area of chapter activity or lack of activity. All of the above are worthy of publication.

As the chapter’s editor, your primary responsibility is to keep the newsletter interesting and informative. Your membership must look forward to receiving your publication. It must enjoy reading your publication and it must feel satisfied after having done so. And remembers to always date the issue and have an officer’s name and phone number by which interested readers can follow up for details. Possible topics for inclusion in your next publication include:

- American flag days and history
- Anniversaries of events and battles
- Annual Budget
- Application requirements
- Birthdays
- Calendar of events
- Chapter elections
- Chapter history (for older chapters) (25 years ago or 50 years ago)
- Chapter members in the news
- Committee activities
- DAR and C.A.R. news
- Deaths, necrology, *in memoriam*, and last call
- Editorials
- Genealogical questions
- High school medals presented
- Informative articles on other genealogical or historical societies
- Interesting genealogical facts
- Invitation to forthcoming events
- Letters to the chapter
- National SAR news
- Patriots’ biographies
- Presentation of awards
- President’s report
- Previous meeting
- Public expressions of appreciation
- Recruiting drives
- Revolutionary War historical information
- Special days and holidays
- State-level or district SAR news, meetings, and officers
- Transferring members
- Welcome new members

Style

Webster's Dictionary defines style as the “mode of expressing thought in writing or speaking by selecting and arranging words.” Style also applies to an individual's uniqueness of expression. Your style is simply and only your own particular way of communicating. Naturally, we cannot influence your style by this handbook and we don't want to. As you read this, you have probably already accepted the position as editor or publisher of your state-level society or chapter's newsletter. You may know your readers on a personal basis just as they may know you. But even if not, don't worry about style; simply write it as you would speak it in normal conversation.

Camera Ready Copy

If your copy is to be photographed as you have typed it, it must be delivered to the printer in a “camera ready” finalized form. This form of hard copy differs from copy to be set in type in two ways. First, this final hard copy is single-spaced in order to offer the reader more information on any given page. Second, this copy must be both letter and punctuation perfect. If you plan to give your printer a camera ready copy, you no longer have the luxury of making even one mistake corrected with a pencil mark.

Errors, of course, are bound to be made in your initial preparation. These can be minimized in the final published newsletter by having a second person look over your typed copy and by correcting all those errors that you may find. If using a typewriter, some of these mistakes may be repaired using white-out. With more complicated errors, you may need to retype the entire line. Then, using a razor blade or similar edge like an X-Acto knife, slice the incorrect line from your original copy and using a clean sheet of paper as backing, simply paste in the new line spacing it carefully between the lines above and below it. The finished newsletter will probably not show the line of cut. The best material for this pasting is rubber cement or glue-sticks not mucilage, as the latter tends to curl or wrinkle the paper.

In cases where you must deliver a camera ready copy to a printer who, in photographing it will shrink the size of the overall block of type, don't assume or speculate as to what length of line and depth of column on your sheet of typing paper will finally result in the proper size block of copy in the finished newsletter. Consult with your printer, who will tell you exactly how many characters wide a line should be and exactly how many lines a column should have. This is simply another way of avoiding costly mistakes before they are made.

Digital or Word Processed Copy

If your publication is created on a computer or other word processor, changes can be made before printing or copying, making it easier to review and revise. Photographs can be added much easier than in the past with digital cameras. It is strongly recommended that editors have computers and printers to enable them to create newsletters more easily and more consistently.

General Preparation

There are many more tips and bits of advice which could be offered here to prepare drafts, deliver copy, and build your relationship with your printer, though they are too numerous to include in this brief handbook. Also, many simply involve that illusive area - called the human element. There are, however, some points worth noting.

If you feel uncertain as to the overall correctness of your camera ready material or have any doubts as to how it will look when finally printed, ask your printer for a copy to proof so that you can examine one isolated copy of your newsletter before the entire press run is made. In this way, you are able to not only see the final product as it will be printed but you also have a last chance at correcting all possible errors.

Readership

Those people who will eventually read your publication are the ones who will determine its tone. All too often, a person will write something while thinking only of what he or she wants to say, not of who might want to listen. This is self-expression, not communication. If you plan to limit your newsletter and direct it strictly to your SAR chapter's members, it can be written in a familiar, intimate tone. We believe it is far more beneficial to think in a larger area of readership. It is a matter not merely of communication but of simple courtesy to send copies of your chapter's publication to your state-level officers. You might

want to send copies to other chapters. You should send a copy to the SAR Genealogical Research Library and the national SAR Headquarters. You may send the letter to prospective members to show them what activities your chapter conducts and what the organization is all about. Each event must be described and explained clearly and thoroughly and each individual in every picture must be identified exactly.

Frequency of Publication

The time and frequency of your chapter's publication should be based on the schedule of its activities. If you hold regular monthly meetings, you should publish monthly. If, however, your meetings are bi-monthly, then your newsletter should be published at least bi-monthly. If you meet on a quarterly basis or only on special occasions, your publication should be scheduled in accordance with these meetings. Regardless of your particular schedule of meetings, two aspects of publishing frequency should be noted. First, the best form of communication is regular and the standard of regularity exists with the calendar itself. In our opinion, a monthly newsletter is best. Second, when conforming to your chapter's schedule of activities, your newsletter should precede a planned event. Ideally, a publication announcing a meeting or other event should arrive at its readership several weeks to a month before the event it announces.

A few chapters have elected to issue a quarterly publication in addition to their monthly communications. In this case, the quarterly bulletin is projected as a permanent record of the chapter and its activities. Where the monthly newsletter is simple in design and functions primarily as a tool to inform the membership of forthcoming meetings and other current news, the quarterly is somewhat more ambitious in projection. It is usually far more elaborate in preparation. It usually contains photographs, articles devoted to chapter events, and other items of a more permanent interest. A monthly publication deals with current news. A quarterly publication is aimed at the chapter's archives.

Newsletter Taboos

There will be times when the information at your disposal is greater than the space you have for publishing it. In cases of this nature, your editorial problems are those of selection. At other times, you will have less news than space and you will have to create something to fill the gap. In both cases, you may be faced with questions of propriety.

Knowing what to publish and what not to publish involves an understanding of what the SAR as a whole, and your chapter as a unit of that whole, represent. It is a matter of being positive at all times and consistently avoiding the negative.

The following examples, admittedly, are incomplete but are offered to show various aspects of the positive and negative as they apply to the SAR.

- Don't endorse political candidates or parties. Even if one of your own chapter members is running for office, avoid this situation. The Sons of the American Revolution is a patriotic organization. It stands for the country as a whole. We are not a political group endorsing any faction, party, or individual. If one of your members is running for office, the fact of his candidacy is news and should be printed in your publication. That is all. To ask for votes is wrong. It is also in direct violation of the SAR's national policy.
- Don't criticize individuals or organizations. There is always room for respectful disagreement among your own members with such issues as location of meeting place or participation in various functions. Certainly, a newsletter should publish positive opinions on the parts of various chapter members and those positive opinions may be in opposition. That is one thing. To criticize, to say an individual is wrong or bad or in any way negative is, in itself, frowned upon, because it reflects negatively on you, the editor, your chapter, and the SAR as a whole.
- Don't limit yourself to publication of only one side of the issue. In dealing with controversy within your chapter or with positive disagreement among individual members of your chapter, show multiple sides of the issue. You may not like the views of an individual, but you have an obligation to show both sides of any issue that in any way affects your chapter and its members.
- You must realize which personal events your members' private lives are positive and which are negative. There will be many newsworthy items. Birth, or course, is a positive bit of news. So is marriage, new membership, a promotion on the job, or an honor received. Strangely, perhaps death can also be seen as a potentially positive news item. A recently deceased member should be remembered in print for his service to the chapter, his family, and the community in which he lived.

The best rule of thumb in dealing with taboos comes from one of Walt Disney's characters, Thumper the rabbit. "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." In addition to this homily, you should face the very hard fact that, as editor of a newsletter published by a non-profit organization, you have a tax exemption, but you are not exempt from the laws of libel. *Black's Law Dictionary* defines libel as an "accusation in writing or printing against the character of a person which affects his reputation, in that it tends to hold him up to ridicule, contempt, shame, disgrace, or obloquy, to degrade him in the estimation of the community, to induce an evil opinion of him in the minds of right-thinking persons, etc."

Illustrations

Throughout most interesting publications there appear many illustrations. Often we think, "How lucky that publisher is to have so many talented artists on his or her staff." The truth, fortunately for us, is just the opposite: most publications do not have a single artist on staff. What they really do is collect existing, usable artwork and supplement their articles with it. Many editors and publishers have collected extensive libraries of art material. Themed publications, such as an SAR newsletter, need only small collections. Copyright laws are very complicated and can get the uninformed into a lot of trouble. There are several basic rules that will prevent difficulties:

- Use only materials that are over eighty years old.
- Do not use any material that is marked "reproduced by permission of so-and-so". You may wish to write the owner of that particular piece of art and ask permission. Remember to have bibliographical citations or references for all of the material you plan to use to avoid any copyright or publishing trouble that might arise later.
- Avoid publications such as *National Geographic* and *American Heritage*, as much of their artwork and images are original and copyrighted.
- During the 1800s, many of our publishing firms produced some very nice advertising artwork or had drawings engraved to illustrate their stories. These are now out of copyright and are safe to use.

The question you are in no doubt asking yourself now is, "Where do I find all of this material?" The following list has acceptable sources for Revolutionary War period artwork, along with comments that should be helpful. Some of these sources are books currently in print and available at the larger book stores. Others are out of print and could be found in used book and magazine shops. All should be readily available.

- Old editions of the *SAR Magazine* - back issues are available from the national SAR Headquarters.
- Pre-1900 U.S. history text books - available in most used book stores and are very reasonably priced. Also, these can be found in thrift shops.
- *American History Illustrated Magazine* - available in used magazine shops. Watch for their original art; however, most are 19th century copies.
- Benjamin Lossing's *Illustrated History of the Revolution* is out of copyright and can be used freely. We would suggest that under a Lossing illustration it be noted as such as his work is considered the best by many.
- Old copies of *Harper's Weekly* or *Century Magazine* are great resources.
- The publications of other societies such as the Society of Cincinnati could be considered.
- The Dover Pictorial Archive Series are in print and usually available at large book stores. A catalog is available from Dover Publications, Inc. at 180 Varick Street; New York, NY 10014.
- John Grafton's *The American Revolution, A Picture Source-Book* contains 411 copyright-free illustrations
- *Handbook of Early Advertising Art* by Clarence P. Hornung (two volumes - Pictorial Volume - (20122-8) is better suited to our purpose.
- *Dictionary of American Portraits* by Howard and Blanche Cirkner
- *Early Illustrations and views of American Architecture* by Edmund V. Gillon, Jr.
- *Decorative Frames and Borders* by Edmund V. Gillon, Jr.
- *The American Eagle in Art and Design* by Clarence P. Hornung (321 different examples)
- Stationers also sell "rub off" letters in various sizes and type styles. Decorations and borders are also available.
- The SAR Newsletters and Periodicals Committee has many pages of patriotic and Revolutionary War era clip art available.
- Many websites offer artwork and icons for free to use in non-commercial use purposes.

To use this acquired art is quite simple. Before you lay out your article, choose the art work you wish to use. Carefully noting the size of the selected piece, simply type the copy to fit around it. If it is too big or small it can be reduced or enlarged by a photocopy machine beforehand. Then, using rubber cement, paste in the art work or insert into your word processing program. For offset printing, you need not concern yourself about the edges of the ‘paste-up’ showing, as the printer’s camera will usually eliminate it. However, if you intend to use photocopy then you may need to carefully apply white-out to the edges so they do not show up later as black lines.

Another facet of using this type of artwork is that you can take several different pieces of artwork and combine them into one that better suits your purpose. It is very easy to do and a few illustrations and photographs will make an otherwise dull publication come to life.

Photographs

If you study any printed photograph closely, you will find that it is composed of hundreds of small dots. The density and size of the dots change throughout the photograph to produce the different shades of gray. The number of dots appearing in any given area of the photograph also changes the sharpness of the details in the printed version of the picture. These are called “halftones” and have been reproduced from an original photograph with the aid of a printer’s screen.

Another possibility available now is to have the photograph scanned by a scanning program on a computer or using digital photos. The resultant photograph can then be stored and modified in a graphic editor program.

Color photographs may not always reproduce well in black and white copies but can still be added nicely to a publication. We strongly recommend that you have an SAR member, armed with a 35mm camera or digital camera to photograph the pictures you wish to publish.

Additionally, having photographs taken during presentations and other activities may distract from the event. Do not hesitate to stage photographs after the meeting; they will be much more attractive if you do. Insist that your photographer try to have a contrasting background.

Lastly, remember not to attempt to “crowd” the photograph. Having too many people in a single photograph can detract from the whole. Sometimes it is better to take several photographs than just one so that the best can later be selected from amongst the choices.

Don’t shoot the picture from a long distance. Say “Excuse me” and get up in front of the subjects and get a good close-up of the subject.

Publication Costs

How nice it would be to have a professionally prepared, full color, glossy magazine published for your SAR chapter’s membership each and every month. Realistically it’s simply not possible. The cost of publishing is high and continues to rise. Cost is the most inhibiting factor in publishing. However, it is not crippling, for there are several methods of reproduction available to you and one of them will fit your chapter’s budget.

- Line set is the most expensive method printing, save engraving. You function only as editor using this method. You give the printer your hard copy and he or she “sets it in type.” It will most likely be done on a computer these days. The printer may also design your artwork and layout in all other areas of publishing.
- The photocopy method of reproduction is inexpensive if you are publishing your newsletter in small quantities. Almost all printers insist upon a minimum press run. Usually, they will refuse to print fewer than one hundred copies unless they make the unit price prohibitively high. Because of this, a small SAR chapter will invariably find itself in a better financial position by dealing with photocopiers rather than printers. If the chapter is fortunate, it will find one of its own members willing to print the newsletter at his own office. There are drawbacks to photocopying though. Your typed copy must be absolutely clean, without error. Cut and splice lines are sometimes difficult to conceal and photographic reproduction may be far from ideal. However, many photocopiers do an excellent job of reproduction. Many even have a photograph setting which produces better photos directly from colored prints. Some costs may be as low as 5¢ per page at local sites such as Office Depot.

- The offset printing method of reproduction is the most common for large numbers of copies. A paper plate is made from your copy and hundreds of copies can be run from it. The only drawbacks are not in the method itself but rather in the limited abilities of the person preparing the copy for the printer. Usually, offset printing is employed on “camera ready” material. These drawbacks are also true as mentioned above for photocopied material. As previously discussed, “camera ready” means that the printer does not have to do anything to your copy other than make the printing plates and print the newsletter. Given acceptable camera ready copy, drawings, and photographs, a good printer can turn your editorial efforts into a work of art.
- With the low price of computers, many SAR members use a computer, printer, and photocopier to publish their newsletters. The computer makes it possible to make a template of your newsletter and save it for future use. All you have to do is change the stories and the pictures. There are several word processing programs available to help lay out the newsletter with standard templates already made available in the software.

Mailing and Distribution

Depending upon the quality of paper, you can usually mail four to five sheets of standard 8 ½” x 11” copy paper in a business-sized envelope for the first class postal rate. Naturally, if these sheets are printed on both sides, you will be able to send ten pages of news for one first class stamp. To save weight, some chapters have elected to use part of one side of the last page as the mailer, hence eliminating the weight and cost of envelopes. This will also allow a sixth page!

The costs of mailing should bring with them a strong desire to increase your chapter’s membership simply because the magic number is 200. With a mailing list of 200 names and addresses, you can obtain a non-profit postal permit, which should reduce your postage expenses. For this reason alone, your chapter should strive for a minimum membership of 150, allowing for the copies that should be sent to the other chapters in the area, including state-level and national officers. There are annual permit charges and fees that should be researched through the U.S. Post Office for further information. However, please note that the mail is not always delivered very promptly. All mail must be bundled in ZIP code order and sorted according to your local post office’s regulations. There is much to consider before taking on the non-profit postal permit, though it may be an effective way of reducing postage costs.

With many people now having access to computers, email, and the Internet, posting the newsletter online may be another inexpensive way to distribute the newsletter to your members. Consideration should be made, however, to different computer software options: not everyone has the same software packages or versions to read your document. It is recommended that your document be submitted in PDF format as Acrobat Reader™ are usually free downloadable programs to allow this format to be read by most users. PDF files also reduce the size of the file as some email servers limit the size of incoming emails and may prevent their receipt by your readership.

Conclusions

Form, format, makeup, layout, artwork, and frequency of publication are all important aspects of communicating with your local chapter’s members and community through regularly issued bulletins and newsletters. Nothing, however, is more important than the communication itself. Naturally, it would be ideal if each one of our SAR chapters was able to print a regular, full color magazine of the same quality as the *SAR Magazine*, though such is not possible.

It is possible, however, to communicate effectively. A letter or one sheet bulletin photocopied on both sides is far, far better than no news at all. No news is not good news. No news is just that: nothing.

Communication is a vital key to every other aspect of the SAR and is absolutely necessary if we are to reach the goals we have set for ourselves and live up to the principles for which we stand.