

# Journalism Milestones

—Arnold Cheyney

## Moses Yale Beach

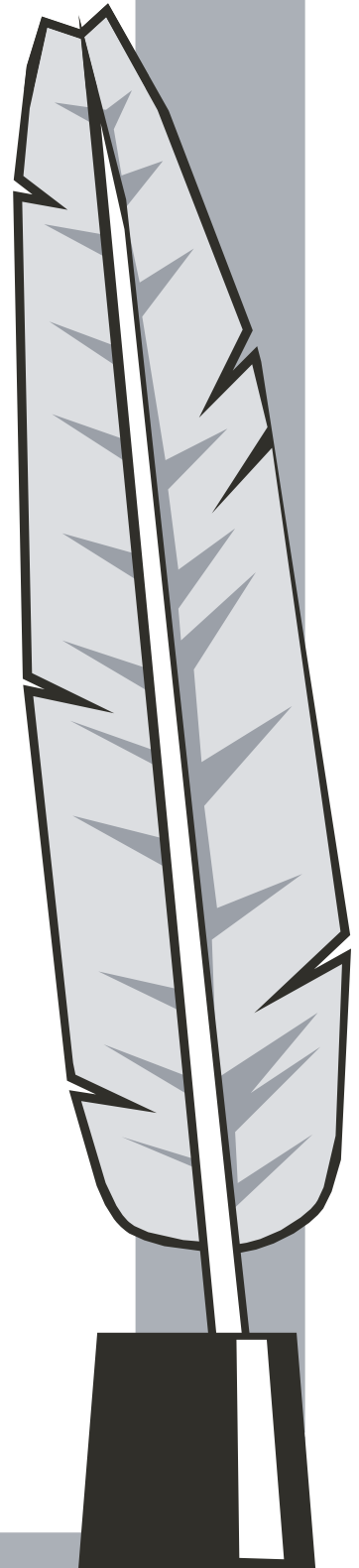
On January 1, 1800, Moses Yale Beach was born. He was the son of Moses and Lucretia Beach, a farm couple. The little boy's talents in mechanics and invention became evident early in his life. By age fourteen, he was serving as an apprentice to a cabinetmaker in Hartford, Connecticut.

Due to his ingenuity, energy, and hard work, Moses was able to purchase his release before his apprenticeship expired. He then set up a cabinet shop of his own and won the Franklin Institute award in cabinet making. He went on to invent a machine that cut rags, which were used in paper mills. Unfortunately, he delayed getting a patent and so received little compensation for his invention. He also invented an engine powered by exploding gunpowder. That was not successful, so he had to discard the idea.

In 1821, he married Nancy Day, the sister of the founder of the *New York Sun*. Moses and Nancy had eight children. He became a partner at the *Sun* with his brother-in-law, Benjamin H. Day. Moses was the newspaper's mechanical supervisor and financial manager. By working with Benjamin, Moses learned much about journalism and received a working knowledge of the newspaper business. The *Sun* was sold on the streets by newsboys at a penny apiece. The low price made it available to working class people. Other newspapers in New York City were sold by subscriptions at six cents a piece. But in 1835, the *Sun* has the largest circulation in New York City: 22,000. The newspaper covered the city's police courts and things of interest to the public: fires, marriages, animal stories and other human-interest items.

In 1838, Benjamin H. Day felt the *Sun* was not consistently profitable so he sold his shares of the newspaper to Moses for \$40,000. Benjamin would later lament, "The silliest thing I ever did in my life was to sell that paper." Moses paid off his debt to Benjamin and the *Sun* was New York's leader in circulation into the mid 1850's.

Moses took two of his sons as partners. Twenty three-year-old Moses Sperry Beach, like his inventive father, constructed a device for feeding rolls of paper into the presses instead of using flat presses. The other son, nineteen year-old Alfred, who was also inventive, worked with his father in the *Sun* office.



Moses concentrated on methods for speeding information more quickly from news sources. He used trains, ships, and the horse express to get news and information to the *Sun's* offices. Moses also used carrier pigeons. In 1842, when the *Sun* needed more room for its offices, he moved from a two-story to a six-story building. He built a pigeon house on the roof, which remained there for fifty years. Part of his flock of carrier pigeons came from London. In England the news was often carried by pigeons from Dublin and Paris to London. In the United States, the pigeons left Washington, DC, at daylight and arrived at noon in New York City. The mail, at that time, took ten hours from the Capital to New York City.

As The *Sun's* circulation rose to 50,000, Moses Yale Beach's health began to fail at age 48. Moses turned the newspaper over to his sons. He returned home to his birthplace in Wallingford, Connecticut, to live out his remaining years. He died July 19, 1868.

## Learning Activities

### Language Arts

- What sentence in the biography of Moses Yale Beach do you think is most important? Defend your choice against those of your classmates.

### Mathematics

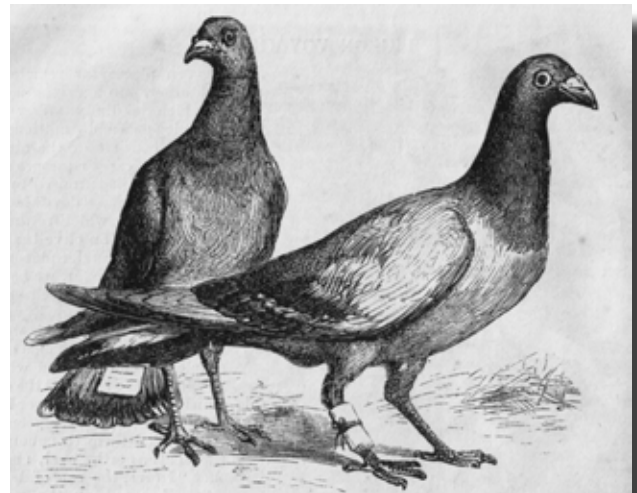
- How many years have passed since Moses Yale Beach died?

### Social Studies

- In an encyclopedia, or other reference material, read about apprentices in Colonial times. Find eight interesting facts and write each in a complete sentence. Share and compare these with your classmates' sentences.
- Pigeons carried news from Dublin, Ireland; and Paris, France; to London, England. What two channels of water did they cross?

### Media

- Practice reading the biography of Moses Yale Beach. Record your reading and play it back for your parents or other relatives.



## Notes: