

2026 Digital Michigan Newspaper Award Application Essay

Ypsilanti Historical Society

The city of Ypsilanti was one of the first settlements in Washtenaw County and over 20,000 residents currently call it home. The city has witnessed trade routes, wartime manufacturing, social upheaval, education, and industry over the course of its history. Since 1972, the Ypsilanti Historical Society has served as the primary depository of information about the history of Ypsilanti, including historical newspapers. In our collections we have hundreds of editions of various newspapers published in the city from the mid 1800s until the mid 1900s. Although our organization has embarked on an ambitious digitization program for our print newspapers, our microfilm newspaper collection has remained inaccessible to most people. Digitizing our microfilm collection of the Ypsilanti Daily Press would provide the public and researchers across the world access to Ypsilanti's most prominent local newspaper of the early 20th century.

For decades, the Ypsilanti Daily Press reported on local, state, and national events. It was the primary newspaper for Ypsilanti's residents, and the historic copies are still referenced often by researchers. The Ypsilanti Historical Society began a newspaper digitization initiative last year, which has worked tremendously well so far. A grant supplied the means for us to purchase a large flatbed scanner, which we have put to use in creating a digital archive from our physical newspaper collection. However, we have hundreds of newspapers stored on microfilm which have never been digitized by any organization.

Most of our microfilm collection consists of editions of the Ypsilanti Daily Press from 1905 to the 1950s. Currently, the only way for the public to access most of these editions is to visit our archives and manually scroll through hundreds of pages of microfilm with our microfilm reader. This is incredibly time consuming work and requires patrons to understand how to use the microfilm reader. The majority of our microfilm has remained untouched since our organization took over certain collections from the city archives, and as such the microfilm has never been indexed. Our organization is made up of a small group of volunteers and two part-time paid interns, so it is difficult to find the time to train patrons on using the microfilm reader and to monitor them while they do so. Digitizing our microfilm newspapers would eliminate this staffing issue while making these editions more accessible to the public and easier to research.

I propose that this grant scans our microfilm of the Ypsilanti Daily Press from February 21, 1905 to March 31, 1911; and April 1, 1912 to December 31, 1930. The copyright for years after 1930 is uncertain, but these editions are all in the public domain. Editions of the Ypsilanti Daily Press from 1911 to 1912 are already scanned from physical copies and are available on our digital archive. The Press was the most prominent newspaper in the city of Ypsilanti throughout the twentieth century, and contains a treasure trove of local history, much of which has not been seen in decades. The Press offered thorough news coverage of local events and employed local reporters and photographers to capture community happenings.

Digitizing some or all of these editions of the Ypsilanti Daily Press would be a boon for local history researchers and would make these editions accessible to people from around the world. These editions cover topics such as Ypsilanti's reaction to World War I, the Great Depression, and more. Patrons expect more of our collection to be digitized, as many of our physical newspaper copies are online. Lifetime residents of the city regard the Ypsilanti Daily Press as the most important local newspaper of the 20th century and would doubtless be overjoyed if this material were made accessible online.