The News at the Ends of the Earth
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The News at the Ends of the Earth: The Print Culture of Polar Exploration.

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Captain Parry! Captain Parry!
Thy vocation stops not here:
Thou must dine with Mr. Murray
And a quarto must appear.
— Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Captain Parry” (1825)

... North Cornwall has not had as yet its Caxton.
— advertisement for Queen’s Illuminated Magazine (1852)

Polar newspapers were created and printed in conditions of extremity in multiple senses. The expeditions for which newspapers formed the shipboard social media, for one, were journeying toward latitudinal extremes approaching 90° S or N. Polar expeditions had infrequent contact with an Anglophone public after a point, and thus the potential for circulation of the media they produced was necessarily exceptionally limited. While their isolation was not complete—in the Arctic, Anglo-American explorers had frequent contact with Inuit and other indigenous peoples and routinely employed Inuit guides—Western expedition members, in their cultural chauvinism, imagined themselves at a supreme distance from others. The meteorological conditions and attendant environmental hardships of life in the polar regions are also notoriously extreme; the mechanical acts of writing and operating printing equipment become challenging in turn.

This chapter describes how sailors came to print at the polar ends of the earth, concentrating on the outfitting, mechanics, and production of presses
and printed materials in the polar regions. (The second and third chapters turn to analysis of the literary and informational content of the papers.) The material and intellectual strategies they brought to bear in mediating the particular challenges of creating printed texts in extreme conditions gave shape to the forms of communicative texts I am calling polar ecomedia. Printing presses were first stocked on Arctic ships in service of the search for Sir John Franklin’s missing Northwest Passage expedition aboard the ships Erebus and Terror, which had left Britain in 1845. The presses were almost immediately requisitioned, however, by crew members for their entertainment during the sunless months of the polar winters. The materials that polar expedition members printed using the presses may reasonably be seen as the curious or charming incidentals of the leisure hours of a collective formed by circumstance. But polar periodicals tell us more than the news (or a mocking facsimile of the news) from the cramped cabins of icebound crews. The ephemeral form of the newspaper is crucial to this story: news conveys information that interrupts a moment in time, even as newspapers are characterized by their periodicity, their marking of time. In Walter Benjamin’s formulation in “The Storyteller,” newspapers provide information but not stories; the storyteller, who offers the benefit and the intimacy of experience, recedes in an age of impersonal information distributed via newspapers. Sailors, those notable travelers and yarn spinners, are storytellers in Benjamin’s account—and the conditions for storytelling, stillness and boredom, are certainly in place in the polar regions. Yet the form of the newspaper, considered in Benjaminian terms, does in fact have utility for sailor storytellers. Arctic and Antarctic voyaging sailors turn to the genre of the periodical not to convey news in the form of information—the content of the papers is parodic, light, and farcical—but to structure their meditations on polar temporality, community, and circulation.

Expeditionary newspapers produced in the Arctic and Antarctica are forms of media that are both shaped by and consciously responding to polar environmental conditions. Newspapers are understood to be periodic, marking daily time. Polar winter, however, is relentlessly nocturnal, out of time. While polar winter rhythms would be disruptive to any unused to their temporal irregularities, they were especially so to sailors accustomed to watch-oriented discipline, in both senses of “watch.” An Antarctic winter, for example, unsettled Otto G. Nordenskjöld’s work with the Swedish Antarctic Expedition in both its labor and literary dimensions; while in polar darkness, he wrote, “A thing that I missed above all things was regular, ordered work. All the preceding pages must have shown the difficulty there
was in arranging such labour, whether indoor work or outdoor.”1 In crafting gazettes, newspapers, and periodicals, expedition members explicitly mark the weirdness of their time and place. They are simultaneously imposing diurnal order on a region without sun and rather seriously calculating what goes awry when temperate forms of periodical writing are imposed on an intemperate world. This is how quotidian newspapers become polar ecmedia: produced by and within the outlandishness of the Arctic and Antarctic environments, they theorize ephemeral ways of reading and writing in and about the polar regions in their very pages.

We see this most clearly in one of the few extant photographs of the actual act of polar printing.2 The photo, Printing the “Arctic Eagle” was taken during the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition (1903–5), a U.S. attempt to reach the North Pole on the ship America. In the image we see a series of bunks, the crowded sleeping quarters of the seamen; this is not an officer’s private cabin. Three men are abed, wrapped in wool blankets, in positions of repose and observation.3 In the foreground are a pair of fur boots. The focus is on the printer, Spencer Stewart, who served as the expedition’s assistant commissary: he is clad in a wool sweater, with a pencil tucked behind his ear. Seated on the edge of the bunk of one of the reclining men, Stewart straddles a hand-operated tabletop press, which appears to be a Boston-produced Golding Official Press. (The name “Golding” is just perceptible on the curved side of the press.) Judging from the machine’s size relative to the printer—and from the size of the press’s production, the newspaper Arctic Eagle—this was probably the Official model no. 6, with a chase size of 8¼ in. × 12½ in.4 A thick stack of folded paper, presumably copies of the Arctic Eagle, is visible on the left. Just above the printer’s right hand the type case is discernible, and the blurred man in motion working with it would be Seaman Allen Montrose, who, according to Commander Anthony Fiala, “had been a wandering newspaper typo before he took to following the sea.”5 The photographer must be squeezed within the frame of the door. Since Commander Fiala himself had previously been the art director and photographer for the Arctic paper’s namesake, the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, we might guess that he operates the camera here.

This remarkable image makes visible the situational intimacy of the mechanics of the production and circulation of shipboard newspapers. Our idiomatic sense of a paper emerging “hot off the press” has a different tactility when the press (its ink, in particular) would have to be thawed for use. The heat and breath of the cluster of bodies in bed around Stewart and Montrose is conjured by this glimpse of printing the Arctic Eagle, the very
body heat and breath that is likely providing much of the room’s meager warmth. Unlike the abstracted, invisible, imagined communities of Benedict Anderson’s classic formulation regarding newspapers, polar periodicals are produced quite literally in the laps of their readership. Notions of print circulation and the political and social bodies of the ship’s community take on new meanings in this context. Half of the men within the space framed by the photograph are in bed; does this imply that the Arctic Eagle is a morning paper? or a very late evening edition? The usual temporalities of newspaper publication, as we will see, do not matter—or they signify differently—in an environment in which the sun might not rise for as many as 120+ days and in which the crew has no easily observable means of marking time.

We cannot tell what time it is in the photograph, nor can polar newspapers mark diurnal or other serial time in the customary manner of the genre. Nautical time is a factor in this ecology as well; sailors’ schedules are typi-
cally divided into four-hour blocks of time known as “watches,” although the standard four-hour watches at sea become attenuated during the relative calm of polar nautical labor. While these are responsive to a twenty-four-hour calendar, a rotating watch system does not establish a natural division between morning and night for nautical laborers. (The American explorer Donald MacMillan was among those who addressed this problem by wearing a twenty-four-hour watch.) The photo *Printing the “Arctic Eagle”* captures in one frame several of the topics that this chapter on polar printing illuminates: the extremity of the circumstances in which polar periodicals were produced and circulated, and the attendant difficulties this produced; the intimacy and social forms of this particular media; and the collectivity of the papers’ creation. Polar ecologies shaped the media forms with which voyagers marked time and established community, however ephemerally.

**Neptune’s Newsrooms**

Printing presses were originally brought to the Arctic to assist in the broad dispersal of messages in the decades-long search for the sizable missing British Northwest Passage expedition commanded by Sir John Franklin, which launched in 1845 with 129 men on two ships, *Erebus* and *Terror*. (I treat this search in greater detail in chapter 4.) Once tabletop printing presses were aboard ship, and after winter storms made fire balloon messaging and the other official uses of the devices impractical, expedition members sought to pass the dark winter hours by adapting the technology to literary and theatrical ends. The presses produced broadsides and playbills for shipboard theatricals, copies of songs and occasional poems composed by mission members, and the community newspapers that I discuss in the next several chapters. Sailors even carved their own large-font type and emblems from the ship’s store of spare lumber stocked for repairs, although wood is at a premium in regions north of the timberline. A number of Arctic expeditionary newspapers were published in the second half of the nineteenth century, including the following Anglophone papers: the *Flight of the Plover, or the North Pole Charivari* (1848); the *Illustrated Arctic News* (1850–51) and the *Aurora Borealis* (1850–51), companion papers by sister ships engaged in the search for Franklin; the *Gleaner* and *Minavilins* (1850–51), underground papers suppressed by ship commanders; the *Weekly Guy* (1852–53); the *Queen’s Illuminated Magazine* (1852–54); the *Polar Almanac* (1854); the *Ice-Blink* (1853–55); the *Port Foulke Weekly News* (1860–61); the *Discovery
FIG 1.2 — Facsimile of the Illustrated Arctic News 3 (31 Dec. 1850), 31. In the bottom right of the image a note indicates that the "large type headings as well as the Arms and devices were cut on board by the Seamen."
News (1875–76); the Arctic Moon (1882–83); the Midnight Sun (1901); and the Arctic Eagle (1903–4). Including papers by non-Anglophone crews on other European expeditions, such as the German Ostgrönländische Zeitung (1869–70) and the Norwegian Framsjaa (1893–96), there were at least seventeen Arctic newspapers between 1848 and 1904, and several others that were conceived of and not carried through (such as the Polar Pirate, 1904). More than half of the British and American commanders of Arctic expeditions in the nineteenth century were involved at some point with a shipboard newspaper.

The existence of literary culture aboard ships and among sailors is not in and of itself unusual over the course of the nineteenth century. Many long-voyaging ships were provided with libraries; sailors read histories, novels, and periodicals, intensively reading (and sharing among themselves) the stock of reading material at hand. And polar voyages, which could plan on enforced periods of relative inactivity during the winter, had larger libraries than many ships. Franklin’s Erebus and Terror, for example, had three thousand volumes between them. The catalogue for the Assistance (engaged in a Franklin search), which was printed aboard ship in 1853, lists novels by Jane Austen, James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, and Walter Scott (plus Scott’s Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft) among scores of volumes of polar history, voyages, and navigational science. Some sailors kept personal journals, while officers contributed to shipboard textual production in the form of logbooks, ship accounts, progress diaries, and—on more official, grander expeditions—narratives of their voyages and discoveries, which often became strong sellers. This was enabled in part by the unusual rates of literacy among seamen, estimated at 75 to 90 percent by the mid-nineteenth century; on polar expeditions, which were more high profile and often more selective, the figures were likely higher. As a laboring class their literacy was encouraged by onboard schools on naval ships (focused on mathematics and navigation as well as letters, all necessary for nautical advancement) and a maritime culture in which leisure time was often spent in storytelling or in theatricals, a particular mainstay of British naval practice adopted at times aboard U.S. ships. The second number of the Illustrated Arctic News was pleased to report on the newly created seaman’s school in “Summary of the Month’s Proceedings”: “Well done!—Education, & improvement are twins. Encourage & foster the one, the other must follow. The Schoolmaster is indeed afloat.”

During the American Lady Franklin Bay Expedition of 1881–84, Commander Adolphus Greely established a “tri-weekly” school at which “arithmetic, grammar, geography, and meteorology
were taught. . . . For a time Dr. Pavy instructed two men in French. The educational qualifications of the men were very good, and there was but one of the party on its original formation who was unable to write, and he acquired that attainment during our stay.” These proportions were typical of polar expeditions. When not engaged in reading or navigational exercises, the leisure hours of polar expeditionary crews were also occupied with dancing (for exercise, by design) and theatrical productions, all of which were long-standing traditions of naval recreation and diversion.

Only on polar expeditions did publishing shipboard newspapers become a frequent activity, even an expectation; newspapers are otherwise rare among seamen’s leisure customs. The first North American Arctic newspaper was not printed but circulated in manuscript, and was in several ways anomalous: it was an experiment not repeated on polar missions for decades, for one. What is more, the paper produced conflict instead of cooperative vision. In the manuscript North Georgia Gazette, and Winter Chronicle (1819–20) of William Edward Parry’s first Arctic expedition, the question of community was quite explicitly debated within the paper itself, as contributors arranged themselves rhetorically against the NCS or “Non-Contributors” to the paper. Aboard the Hecla and the Griper, Parry’s ships, this literary economy was defined by the officer corps, by and for whom the paper was created. The North Georgia Gazette, and Winter Chronicle was later printed in London a year after the expedition’s return, in response to “the interest which the Public took in all that had passed during the voyage.” But the details of the Arctic context in which the expedition’s officers (who constituted the paper’s stringers) understood their impish attacks on journalistic noncontribution had no resonance when replayed back within national borders. Articles that suggested the mission’s collectivity was fragile or threatened, even if humorous, were in fact suppressed upon the voyage’s return to Britain. The economies of literary circulation—of the barely public sphere of the polar mission—were in flux in this first Arctic paper (discussed in chapter 2); their terms would continue to change in subsequent expeditionary newspapers.

Decades after this first manuscript experiment, polar newspapers were resurgent. They shared a number of qualities in common. Their content was light and farcical, in large part, and offered satiric commentary on polar environmental conditions. Arctic and Antarctic newspapers were produced during the several months of polar darkness in which expeditions wintered over, their ships bound by ice and their crews relatively stilled—and, as David H. Stam and Deirdre C. Stam have argued, looking for ways to
mark the time. The process of marking time by expedition members was, in turn, stamped by polar conditions. In the Arctic and Antarctica, extreme printing became more than a novelty or a curiosity: expedition members used the ephemeral periodical form of the newspaper as a counterpoint to (and a satiric commentary on) the temporal and ecological distortions and extremities of the polar regions. The nearly simultaneous and necessarily limited production and consumption of these texts by polar voyagers represents an unusual print circuit—intensified but not exceptional—that emerges from the intersection of the ecological, geographic, scientific, and nationalist aims of expeditions; the manual labor performed by polar voyagers; and developing technologies of print and literary culture.

Understood as passenger entertainment and edification, shipboard newspapers in and of themselves are not unheard of when created by nonlaboring travelers, as Jason R. Rudy has demonstrated compellingly in the context of nineteenth-century British long-voyaging passenger ships to Australia and other settler colonies. Emigrants to the British colonies had high literacy rates and commonly produced newspapers during their lengthy passages, originally in manuscript form, and later on printing presses; passengers could subscribe to the paper in order to ensure a souvenir copy at the end of the voyage. During an 1891 voyage undertaken by the British passenger liner City of Paris, for example, a gazette was “printed on board” by the travelers; its object was to provide “interesting reading during spare moments.” The headnote to the “Miniature Newspaper” concludes that if the publication “serves as a souvenir of the voyage to friends at home it will accomplish the object for which it is intended.” A substantial portion of the content of such papers was poetry, Rudy has found, in the forms of both parodic rewriting of popular contemporary poetry and original verse, often nostalgic in tone. My research in a range of maritime collections finds that passenger papers were somewhat less of a tradition in the North American context. The Kemble Maritime Ephemera Collection at the Huntington Library, for instance, holds records for over 925 shipping companies, mostly passenger cruise ships operating between 1855 and 1990. Only thirty-six shipboard newspapers appear in the twenty-four thousand records in the collection. Of these thirty-six, the majority consist of wire telegraphy news, supplemented by ship-specific menus and social calendars. In North American ship papers there are relatively fewer poems written by passengers in the manner described by Rudy, in which British emigrants used the national poetic form to reimagine themselves as colonial subjects. We are given a glimpse of this process (in a return to the imperial homeland) in the
**Austral Chronicle**, a biweekly journal published aboard a large passenger ship traveling from Sydney to London in 1886. The paper’s prospectus observes, “No town in any English-speaking community, inhabited by like numbers to those now afloat in the ‘Austral,’ would or could exist and hold together without its newspaper. Then why should the population of the ‘Austral’ not have its newspaper?” The editors of the *Austral Chronicle* seem to be classic Andersonian subjects, imagining national communities afloat. Yet passenger liner newspapers (as well as polar periodicals, as we will see) were imagined communities with a crucial difference: their addressed constituency was not imaginary but fully and wholly present. The *Cunard Cruise News*, for example, described itself as “the only newspaper issued the world over that has a circulation of one hundred per cent in its community.” The function that papers serve in establishing community is oriented less to an abstract notion of the nation and more toward a motile, ephemeral, and yet entirely at hand collectivity.

What kind of public did the editors of and contributors to polar newspapers have in mind? There exists a mutually constitutive relationship between an association and its newspaper, as Tocqueville describes it in *Democracy in America*: “A newspaper . . . always represents an association, the members of which are its regular readers. That association can be more or less well-defined, more or less restricted, and more or less numerous, but the seed of it, at least, must exist in people’s minds, as evidenced by nothing more than the fact that the newspaper does not die.” These communities took many forms throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tocqueville’s claims are derived from the smaller, voluntary associations he observed in the United States in the 1830s, what Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, identified in the previous century as forms of “private society,” an oxymoron whose axes of meaning have subsequently converged. The elements Anderson stipulates as essential to the literary genre of the national newspaper are also found in smaller collectives on a local or private scale, such as the assembly of seemingly unrelated parts into a fictive whole conjoined only by their “calendrical coincidence,” their temporal or spatial proximity. For Anderson the newspaper and the book are necessarily “mass-produced industrial commodit[ies]” that can reach a large and dispersed population seemingly simultaneously; he finds “community in anonymity.” Shaftesbury’s coteries, on the other hand, along with Tocqueville’s voluntary associations, are characterized by their intimacy and their ephemerality rather than by their vast scale or their facelessness. To what extent, then, can the national and the anonymous attributes
of the newspaper themselves be imagined, even when the circulation of the newspaper is restricted? I am interested, in other words, in how the genre of the newspaper is itself imagined by communities: how the idea of a public becomes “constitutive of a social imaginary,” in Michael Warner’s formulation. That is, if for Anderson newspapers allowed a broadly dispersed population a sense of belonging to the imagined community of the nation, then the polar newspapers, in an alternative move, enable a close-knit local community—one flung far from the geophysical place of the nation—to establish an imagined community apart from it. Not the “silent privacy” of newspaper reading “in the lair of the skull” that Anderson describes, polar newspapers were read aloud and in common to the collective. The polar community both constitutes and is constituted by the newspaper’s production. Polar newspapers emerge from a place of paradox within these discourses of newspaper, print culture, community, and nation, as they are tiny bodies of shared interest that in and of themselves constitute the mass totality of a culture. Unlike the associations mentioned by Tocqueville, or the coffeehouse coteries described by David Shields, which were contained within a broader world of sociability and print, the polar literary communities were completely isolated from any possibility of communication with other polities or individuals—even if their missions represented a nation’s interest. The newspapers that Arctic expeditions produced, then, are at once mass-market-produced commodities and privately circulated bits of ephemera.

We see something closer to this model on North American ships whose passengers, in contrast to those on British liners, were perhaps more likely to be traveling for leisure or employment than emigration. Among the handful of poems by passengers appearing in the Kemble Maritime Ephemera Collection’s newspapers we find a lofty ode to the voyage; a comic bit of doggerel about alcohol use (“Pure water is the best of drinks, / That man to man can bring, / But who am I that I should have / The best of anything”); and a poem titled “Creeds” by a Mrs. E. Alsheimer of Phoenicia, New York, who declares that she “takes no heed of [her] neighbor’s birth,” yet in her racist sense of magnanimity will grant anyone “a white man’s place on earth” as long as he is “clean.” Several East Coast ships traveling to the California gold fields in 1849 had manuscript newspapers written by fortune seekers. Boasting— inaccurately—that theirs was the “only paper published on the Pacific Ocean,” the editors of Bound Home or The Gold-Hunters’ Manual of 1852 felt an expansive sense of their periodical’s reach: “Our facilities are greatly increasing in every direction for opening and
extending our different agencies in every part and portion of the habitual
globe, having lately formed extensive arrangements in China, Pekin, Nan-
kin, the Feejee Islands, the North Pole, the Red Sea, the Spacific Isles, and
the Solar Peas.”29 The final two malapropistic markets cheerfully admit the
glory of the ambitions of the Bound Home. The Emigrant, the organ of the
Alhambra, bound for San Francisco from New Orleans, featured naviga-
tional updates as well as poetry written by the ship’s captain. The captain’s
final contribution to the Emigrant offered the following benediction to his
Gold Rush passengers:

Your saddle bags shall yet be filled
With Sacramento’s glittering ore.
Your doubts and fears shall all be still’d
And troubles come not near you more.30

The voyages on which these newspapers were produced, it is important
to note, were experienced by the papers’ contributors as one-way trips:
emigrants and Gold Rush fortune-seekers would generally not be making
a return passage on the vessel. The time they had to pass aboard ship was a
time in transit from one mode of life to another, for unlike sailors, the sea
was neither the space of their work nor the time of their permanent leisure.

Sailor newspapers, written entirely by the laboring crew of a vessel rather
than by passengers at relative leisure, are far more rare. Why are they singu-
lar? Seamen are at work and cannot leave their job site at the end of a day to
return home; even when off duty they remain on call. While mariners made
time for literary and other forms of imaginative exchange when they could,
the forms of collective work such as the creation of newspapers would be
difficult when a ship was under way. To give some rough perspective: the
National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England, preserves records for
thousands of ships; of just six manuscript newspapers from long-voyaging
ships of the nineteenth century identified in their holdings, only three
papers are written by seamen (the other three are passenger newspapers).
While this is obviously not the total number of seamen’s newspapers in the
period—and very likely not the total among the holdings in the National
Maritime Museum—it is proportionally similar to what I have seen in
twenty years of archival research on sailors. (This relational rarity also pro-
vides some context for my surprise when first encountering the Facsimile of
the Illustrated Arctic News, as described in this book’s preface.) The extrem-
ity of polar environmental conditions accounts for the difference between
the relative anomaly of sailor-produced newspapers on long-voyaging ships
and their prevalence on Arctic and Antarctic expeditions. Polar ships, unlike other oceangoing vessels, were immobilized by ice for a substantial part of the year, and their crews—smaller in number than those on naval vessels, in general—had more time and space for communal efforts. The broader literary culture of sailors is robust, as my earlier work documents; within that culture, though, the genre of printed shipboard newspapers composed entirely by polar expedition members is unique.\footnote{31}

The very presence of printing presses at sea in the nineteenth century is likewise unusual in the time before ship-to-shore wireless telegraphy became practicable in the late nineteenth century. In the infrequent occasions when presses were employed on ship, they were generally in the service of colonial activity or warfare.\footnote{32} The terms of surrender for a temporary defeat of Simón Bolívar by Royalist forces in Venezuela in 1815, for example, were circulated via a broadsheet printed aboard a Spanish naval ship, under the imprint “Frigata Diana Imprenta del Exército Expedicionario” (The Expeditionary Army Press of the Frigate Diana).\footnote{33} There were other forms of extreme printing in the period, as well. U.S. soldiers printed battlefield newspapers during the Civil War and Spanish-American War on portable presses, as James Berkey’s work has explored.\footnote{34} Elizabeth Harris notes of the Civil War, “Command posts in the field needed to turn out notices and orders, soldiers of some units produced weekly or ‘occasional’ newspapers, and traveling printing offices were very desirable.”\footnote{35} Presses were hauled onto the ice during various “Frost Fairs” on the Thames River in London, on those occasions when the river froze solid and deep enough to sustain a city fair. In 1683, for instance, the printer Croom sold commemorative postcards from the frozen river. In 1814, when as many as ten presses were in operation at the Frost Fair, a 124-page book, \textit{Frostiana; Or a History of the River Thames in a Frozen State}, was printed on the ice.

Extreme printing provides an enduring record of a temporary event. A card, newspaper, or playbill printed in an exceptional space or circumstance is an instantiation of something more permanent (or at least, something occurring in a different temporality), designed to commemorate an event fleeting, tenuous, never intended to last. In the case of a Thames River Frost Fair, a printed postcard can be seen as a textual monument to the rarity of the river’s total solidity—the printedness itself becomes momentous. Yet periodical print is itself a category of ephemera, designed to be used and discarded in turn. Like Frost Fair printing, polar newspapers commemorate a temporary community formed by climatic extremity. The particular properties of Arctic ice add a special element to the extremity of this form
of printing too. While the period of a frozen-over Thames may be of far shorter duration than a wintry Arctic, its shallow river ice is relatively stable. In the Arctic, sea ice is ever in motion, and ships wintering over in the North are at risk of being squeezed, pitched sideways, crushed. A sunless winter aboard an ice-locked ship would seem to provide stasis and a longer interval for the exercise of printing newspapers than other extreme forms of printing enjoy, and the winter’s relative stability would be more suited to a newspaper’s seriality. Yet the paper’s ephemerality—both generically and materially—is kept forcefully in play by the challenges posed by the climate to the physical and mental integrity of the newspaper’s community.

Unlike other transitory instantiations of pressrooms, Arctic publishing is significant for the very genre of its periodical production, the content and organ of the newspaper itself. A newspaper—unlike a postcard or a book—suggests an ongoing duration: it is an ephemeral, cyclical issuance with a presumption of continuity and futurity. In a region without diurnal time during the winter months, newspapers are conditioned by and responding to different temporal and ecological conditions. Polar periodicals are works of ecomedia: means of communication whose form, content, production, and circulation provide opportunities for their creators—and for Anthropocene observers today—to reframe their, and now our, understandings of ecological spaces and of human endurance in tenuous conditions.

From Grub Street to Trap Lane

Ephemera nevertheless requires hardware. Polar voyage narratives, newspapers, and admiralty records are frustratingly short on specifics about the outfitting of the presses that traveled to the ends of the earth, and are also reticent on the details of the make and model of the equipment. Printing presses did not become easily portable until the second half of the nineteenth century; in 1848, the year a press was first put to use on an Arctic expedition, industry design standards likely meant that this first Arctic press was larger than a tabletop model. Later presses, however, appear to have been smaller manufactures such as the Golding Official letterpress used on the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition discussed earlier (as seen in figure 1.1). Elaine Hoag’s superb bibliographic scholarship on the printing aboard the Franklin search ships makes the case that between 1850 and 1854 the various expeditions had with them secondhand Albion or Columbian half-sheet demy presses (such as on Edward Belcher’s Assistance mission) or folio-foolscap-
size Stafford or Cowper bellows presses (such as on Rochfort Maguire’s _Plover_). The _Plover_’s bellows press was purchased by the Admiralty, according to an invoice in its records: “Izod, Messrs.: To be paid £5 bill for supply of a bellows press &c for the Plover.”36 Another press had recently landed from a returning expedition needed to be repaired.37 Others could have been spare machines from the Admiralty’s own printing shops.38 It is somewhat surprising that complete lists of press materials—tabletop press model descriptions, paper type, ink volume—do not make it onto the provision lists for Arctic voyages, which customarily engaged in exhaustive provisioning accounting practices, denoting every box of nails, roll of twine, tin of potted meat, and pair of woolens. (Hoag argues that cuts in Admiralty funding at the time might explain the “haphazard outfitting” that landed older presses on Franklin search ships and, in turn, produced the uncharacteristically scant historical record regarding the provisioning of such presses.) The circumstances of their presence aboard ship is otherwise mentioned in passing if at all, for the most part: “A printing-press was given to the expedition by the Admiralty for printing balloon-papers,” which were brief messages printed on brightly-colored silk or oiled paper and distributed in bundles attached to the lit string of a hydrogen balloon (see chapter 4). “There were no printers in the squadron, but some of the officers soon learned the art; and besides balloon-papers, play-bills, and announcements of fancy dress balls, were regularly sent to press,” reports the preface to _Arctic Miscellanies_ (a collection of the articles in the shipboard paper _Aurora Borealis_ that was later published in London in 1852).39 Maguire, who served on the Franklin search ship _Plover_ at Point Barrow, Alaska (1852–54), reported in his journal, “A small printing press formed a part of the liberal supply granted to us by their Lordships on leaving London.”40 Among the miscellaneous collected papers of that particular expedition’s surgeon is a newspaper clipping advertising Waterlow’s Autographic Press, which was a lithographic copying mechanism rather than a typesetting press. (If that device were on ship, it could have been used for the duplication of shipboard letters, memoranda, or cache records, or for the reproduction of illustrations, as in at least one case an expedition brought with it a set of images from London to supply an anticipated shipboard paper.41

There was a press aboard the _Assistance_ to print silk and paper balloon messages for the Franklin search; it was not used to print the ship’s manuscript newspaper _Aurora Borealis_ but instead was put into service producing a shipboard library catalogue, playbills, poems, and advertisements for amusements. An article in the _Aurora Borealis_ cheekily entitled “The Rise
and Progress of Printing in the Arctic Searching Expeditions”—in just the first year of Arctic printing—documents how the Assistance crew moved quickly to bring their own “industry and artistic merit” to transform the materials on hand. “The press, and materials belonging to it, were only sufficient for the purpose of printing the papers attached to the balloon,” we learn; “hence a limit was placed to the ambition” of the expedition members. (This indicates that it likely was a small tabletop press designed for printing social calling cards at home, which are about the size of the balloon messages.) Refusing to accept such limitations, the Aurora reports, the crew—in a demonstration of the kind of mental and mechanical “improvements arising from leisure and emulation”—carved new large-type capital fonts, including “the shaded letter, the double-lined letter, and the white letter in black relief.” For their final printed program of the Royal Arctic Theatre’s season, the crew continued to improvise, amplifying the ambition of the artistry of their carved emblems and devices; on the playbill, “the coat of arms, the Prince of Wales’s plume, the delicately-carved rose, shamrock, and thistle, the border of oak leaves, acorns, and laurel, spoke well for the industry and artistic merit of all concerned.”

A mania for printing was created among the crew, “The Rise and Progress of Printing” attests:

The eagerness with which all the productions were sought after, requires to be seen to be understood. The applicants for copies were not content with impressions on paper, but every variety of material went to press in a most ludicrous manner; silk pocket-handkerchiefs, shirts, calico, satin, and even a blanket. Here we fancied the furor would have ceased, but, to our surprise, one person brought a monkey-jacket, and another a chamois-leather.

This indeed must have been gratifying to the printers; and, to their credit be it spoken, during the greater part of three days there was a rapid despatch of business. May they, in their future attempts, succeed as well. Should the art of printing at this establishment continue to improve at the same rate as heretofore, we will back our Arctic press against the world.

In years to come, every little souvenir of our sojourn here will be prized for the recollections it will give rise to—of the comfort and amity that existed among the members of the “Austin happy family.”

In these early moments of Arctic printing, the novelty of the presence and performance of the press itself was paramount, judging from the baroque range of media on which sailors printed. They were proud too of
their ingenuity in creating new type blocks for the press; an article in the *Queen's Illuminated Magazine*, which had printed headers but was otherwise mostly handwritten, reports, “The Headings and Large Capital letters too are a proof of the taste of Lieut. May, and the skill of Bery and Young.”44 (Walter May was an expedition artist, Benjamin Young the ice quartermaster.) To think of these fabrications as “souvenirs” thus makes them consistent with the mementos printed during Thames Frost Fairs—their outlandishness of production, not their content, was the point. As newspapers became more habitual with polar exploration, the genre itself became the focus of the energies (and the creative expression of the assemblage) of the “happy family” constituted by a ship’s crew.

Edward Belcher included his expedition’s press among a list of the literary materials comprising the ship’s extensive library, which featured religious volumes, travel narratives, histories, popular novels (including Melville’s *Typee* and *Omoo*), and titles such as *Bathing and Personal Cleanliness*.45 While the library’s holdings were supplemented by personal contributions, Belcher indicates that the press was provided by the Admiralty: “The libraries furnished to each vessel contained all that was asked, which, aided by private collections, left nothing to be wished for in that department. A very excellent printing press, with full type, was supplied to the leading commands, and was found useful.”46 In the Admiralty accounts for 1852, a line item on April 5 authorizes Belcher “to procure a Printing Press for use of the Expedition Est. £15.”47 The diary of the assistant surgeon and quartermaster for the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition, Charles Seitz, mentions that the ship was provided with “a fine library and a printing press and papers from the *Brooklyn Eagle*,” the paper for which Fiala had written before turning Arctic explorer.48 As my discussion of a photograph from this expedition at the opening of this chapter conjectures, this was a Golding Official tabletop press. A full-page feature in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* on its Arctic sister publication affords one of the only detailed breakdowns of an Arctic press outfit, specifying the various forms of type aboard the *America* (but not the press model). Noting that the press and type had been saved for a time by the crew—at no small effort—after the ship had been crushed by the ice, the *Brooklyn Eagle* reports that production on the paper helped pass the eighteen months the expedition spent hoping for rescue. But during the crew’s final thirty-mile trek to a relief ship, the press and type had to be abandoned, and Fiala details to his old Brooklyn colleagues precisely which type he has been unable to return:
One font 9 point old style, in one Rooker job case.
One package type and spaces, 9 point.
One font of 18 point head letter in one case.
23 Articles and items, set in minion, in 17 packages (2 sets of proofs of this matter furnished).
Two casts of heading “The Arctic Eagle” with parallel rule cast under, also one brass parallel rule to match.
One brass column rule for first page.
One brass column rule for second page.
Dashes—3 styles.
Borders, column width—4 patterns.
One double column composing rule.
One single column composing rule. 49

In its level of specificity the Brooklyn Daily Eagle feature devotes an attention to the materiality of the Arctic press outfitting that reflects a journalist’s interests and expertise—rather than that, say, of a career naval officer. Fiala’s printing experience did not necessarily translate to nautical expertise, it should be noted; he was an object of contempt in the eyes of some of his crewmen, one of whom, George Shorkley, kept a notebook of his most absurd statements, which he called “Fialisms.” Just one example, with Shorkley’s parenthetical commentary: “(While his face and hands were blue and his teeth chattering)—’I feel that I was born for the Arctic. While strong men shiver in heavy furs, I am uncomfortably warm in ordinary attire.” 50

It is conceivable that there was a printing press aboard the United States, Isaac Israel Hayes’s 1860 expeditionary ship, even though his men produced the Port Foulke Weekly News as a manuscript paper. Hayes’s voyage narrative does not specify a press, although the opening prospectus of the Port Foulke Weekly News offers the following (possibly satirical) explanation for its scribal rather than print publication: “We hurried our paper through the press, without using our new font of type,” an urgency that was compelled by the desire “to please” the paper’s “borrowers and non-subscribers” alike—who must then not “criticize, or make remarks concerning typographical appearances.” The newspaper is imagined here as an organ that can unify a potentially fractious crew and create the conditions for a “happy family,” as the Aurora Borealis did aboard the Assistance. Since the Port Foulke Weekly News came out well, the prospectus continues, “we will probably reserve
the type to make either balls of, for the purposes of sending dispatches to, and dispatching any troublesome neighbors." 51 (These “troublesome neighbors” requiring dispatches by way of lead ball ammunition would include polar bears, which are very dangerous to humans in the polar North, despite the light tone taken here.) An expedition’s crew could stop using a press it had previously employed in newspaper publication too. For example, the first three numbers of the Arctic Eagle were printed, while the fourth was in manuscript hand, but the men of the America had a fair excuse not to take
FIG 1.4 — Royal Arctic Theatre playbill, printed on pink paper. General Reference Collection C.45.i.11. © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD.

FIG 1.5 — Royal Arctic Theatre playbill, printed on blue paper, possibly a proof sheet. General Reference Collection C.45.i.11. © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD.
the trouble to set type: in the interim, their ship had been demolished by ice. The prospectus for the *Queen’s Illuminated Magazine* was printed, and the newspaper had printed headers, but the paper was generally handwritten and hand-illustrated; the same is true for the *Illustrated Arctic News*, which had elaborate and extensive printed headers and printed theatrical announcements but was otherwise in manuscript hand. The first fully printed Arctic paper was the *Weekly Guy* (1852).
In at least one other instance, a proffered press never made it on ship, as Carl Koldewey reports of the German Arctic expedition of 1869–70 aboard the Hansa. “We thought that . . . we ought to follow the example of our predecessors,” Koldewey writes of the origin of the manuscript newspaper Ostgrönländische Zeitung (East Greenland Gazette), which, like a number of other Arctic newspapers, was edited by the ship’s surgeon. “Unfortunately, a small printing press, given by the printing-house at Bremerhaven, had not followed us on board. In order, therefore, to have two copies, one for the cabin and one for the forecastle, we had to take the trouble to write it.”52 The distinction drawn here between the cabin (occupied by the officers) and the forecastle (occupied by the common seamen) was common to general shipboard hierarchies and was certainly a factor in the fractious-

FIG 1.7 — Playbill produced on board HMS Intrepid during the Franklin search led by Sir Edward Belcher. Printed in black and red on cream silk. TXT0090. © NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON.
ness displayed by and in the manuscript newspaper of Parry’s first expedition’s newspaper, the *North Georgia Gazette, and Winter Chronicle*. But by this point in this history of nineteenth-century Arctic expeditions most polar newspapers had more explicitly leveled such nautical class structures, at least in their rhetorical insistence on the equal value of the contributions (and printing skill) of the “men” or common seamen. Other than possible differences in national naval traditions, the need for two copies of the newspaper aboard Koldewey’s *Hansa* may reflect instead the practical obstacles to general dissemination of the periodical when produced by manuscript hand rather than on a printing press. On Hayes’s *United States* expedition, which had a manuscript paper, there were only fifteen men, making it among the smallest of polar ventures in the period; the need for multiple copies was likely not as urgent. The *Illustrated Arctic News* too counted “the men” both among its contributors and its printers; as the preface to *Arctic Miscellanies* (a collection of *Aurora Borealis* articles) testifies, “Several of the men, too, became adepts in the art of printing, and set up in type, songs and other trifles, chiefly of their own composition.”

Albert Hastings Markham’s memoir provides the fullest description of the outfitting and layout of an Arctic printing establishment. He notes that each ship in the expedition “had been provided, before leaving England, with a printing-press, and an officer and seaman [Lieutenant George Giffard and Able Seaman Robert Symons] had been instructed in its use.” The printers issued a prospectus for their printing “firm,” as Markham calls it, which promised that they would “carry on the Noble Art of Printing in a Style & with a Rapidity hitherto quite unattainable.” It was difficult for Giffard and Symons to carve out space for their venture on the ship, however, as Markham’s memoir testifies:

The “cost” and “trouble” . . . that were expended in obtaining a convenient place in which to carry out the “noble art of printing,” were caused by the fact that our photographers were equally anxious, with our printers, to possess themselves of the small cabin lately occupied by my cousin [Clement Markham], and which is so grandiloquently alluded to as “extensive premises.” In fact, for some little time it was a very sore and vexed question between those two celebrated and energetic firms. Trap Lane was so called in consequence of the after-hold being immediately outside the door of the cabin; and it occasionally served as a very disagreeable kind of man-trap when, through inadvertence, the hatch had not been replaced. As this part of the ship was, during the early part of her com-
mission, in total darkness, owing to the pile of stores that were stowed in every available corner, it is no wonder that unsuspecting individuals should occasionally have fallen into the trap!

Our printing-press was, it is almost needless to say, of great use to us during the winter; for, although it never printed very much for the public service, it was constantly called into requisition for the purpose of striking off programmes for our dramatic and other entertainments; and on such important events as birthdays and Christmas-day we indulged in the extravagance of printed bills of fare. On the whole the printing establishment on board the “Alert” tended very materially to beguile the tedium of our long nights, and must therefore be regarded as a decided success.55

We see here, first of all, the exceptionally constrained physical spaces in which the crew members were operating in general aboard ship, however amusingly conjured in the idea of the icebound ship constituting a “city.” The “extensive premises” of the printing office, according to the prospectus, are located “within half a minute’s walk of the foremost Quarter Deck Ladder, and easily accessible to all parts of the city.”56 Markham observes that ironic remarks about the grand quarters—and their attendant hazards—disguise some actual tensions among the printers and the photographers: to claim any corner for creative work could be a battle, as the photographers would be engaged in expeditionary work, not art for the sake of art alone.

More provocatively, Markham here makes a distinction between the “public service” in support of which the printing press could be put to use, and its counterpart—which would presumably constitute the “private.” The public service would likely be linked to the expedition’s mission to attempt the North Pole (Markham is describing George Nares’s 1875–76 large British Arctic Expedition), although he notes that the press is not employed to this end. The expedition members take it up instead for their private use, which, crucially, does not mean individual use. The private function performed by the press attends to the ship’s body as a whole in printing “programmes for our dramatic and other entertainments,” Markham writes, as well as “printed bills of fare” for communal holiday meals and birthday celebrations. We might generally associate newspapers with a public function, but polar newspapers violate one of the definitions of a public in the sense that all of its members is intimately known to one another.57 It is against this particular concept of publicness that Markham defines the Arctic Press’s function throughout the ship as “private.”

The language of “privacy” and “private use” to indicate ship-wide community recurs in Arctic newspapers. The Port Foulke Weekly News begins
with an invocation of the “private family circle” that comprises the entirety of the paper’s readership and the crew, in a representative example. Within the pages of the newspapers, gazettes, and weeklies, editors and contributors alike demonstrate an awareness of the relative privacy of the circumstances of their periodicals’ distribution, given the absence of a reading community beyond that of their shipmates. Yet at the same time they recognize that polar newspapers are calling into being an Arctic public defined not just by proximity or happenstance but by specific ecological conditions. Within the space of the newspapers we can see expedition members working out ideas of how communities can be both public and private, how transient assemblages can form worlds elsewhere, even in the face of geophysical and ecological extremity.
Amateur Communities

Shipboard-printed newspapers increasingly became standard to the leisure and community-building practices of Arctic expeditions, and eventually Antarctic ones; they remain so to this day. The forms of exchange that take place within their pages reflect a learned, experiential sense of the relationship between the polar environment and what we might call a polar imprint: the mark that expeditions sought to make on what the poetic imagination of the day held to be the Arctic’s sublime blankness. Polar newspapers also demonstrate an expansive sense of contribution and collective exchange, both within the expeditions themselves, and within the polar regions more broadly. Expeditionary interest in the genre of the newspaper is a reflection of the broader cultures of print in the nineteenth century, in both Britain and the United States, in which newspapers played significant roles as organs of nationalism and examples of amateur literary production. At the same time, newspaper production is consistent with polar expeditionary culture itself, in its imperative to produce volumes of writing as a hedge against polar blankness. As polar gazettes became conventional to expeditionary practice, certain periodical and aesthetic conceits became literary conventions among expedition members as they explored the genre of the newspaper as a way to meditate on—and mediate—questions of Artic temporality and isolation.

In all cases, Arctic literary imprints, ephemera by the definitions of literary genre, have been treated in turn as ephemeral to the histories of polar exploration, which tend to mention Arctic newspapers alongside theatricals and shipboard libraries in a brief paragraph or two describing winter pastimes. The exception is the excellent bibliographic work on polar publishing done by Elaine Hoag and by David H. Stam and Deirdre C. Stam, as well as Elizabeth Leane’s analysis of Antarctic newspapers. Arctic imprints constitute a small and dispersed archive found in the miscellaneous folders, generally, of those expedition members whose papers have been collected in archives, and—among this already small class—within the smaller subset of those who kept samples of polar printing as souvenirs. (Hoag estimates the total number of imprints produced in the Arctic in a five-year stretch at midcentury, the height of the Franklin searches, at around one hundred; she doesn’t work with Antarctic material.) A collection of printed theatrical playbills from the Nares British Arctic Expedition (1875–76) held at the Scott Polar Research Institute, for instance, had been preserved by an able seaman on the mission named William Maskell; his
daughter donated them to the archive in 1942. John Simpson, a surgeon on several Arctic expeditions, tucked theatrical programs into his journal of one voyage. In another example, a librarian at the Virginia Historical Society came across what she characterized as a “curious scrap of paper” in the society’s holdings while researching a website feature on a different polar mission. The tattered paper, partly printed and partly inscribed in ink, is an 1850 balloon dispatch from the HMS Resolute engaged in a search for Franklin. In a 2013 blog post written on the balloon message, the librarian Katherine Wilkins wonders, “How could a scrap of paper be retrieved from the Arctic circle and placed in the collections of the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, Virginia?” The repository does not know the provenance of the item, she continues, which suggests “that it has been in our collections for a long time. We may never learn how we acquired this unique item.”

In my own research for this book, I have traveled to thirty-odd archives in five countries, the majority of which hold only a single periodical or a handful of examples of Arctic or Antarctic imprints. The archival presence of the balance of these imprints, in turn, is not readily apparent from library finding aids, which have historically privileged the printed voyage accounts and correspondence associated with polar exploration.

In my research for this project, I have seen multiple versions of the same couple of playbills printed from this press on different media: paper (of various colors), linen, silk, and chamois (see figures 1.3–1.7). Some of the newspaper and theatrical advertisements that survive are printed on yellow or blue paper and may be proof sheets, which could explain their presence in the archive as reserve copies. In the playbills one can also observe examples of the emblems as well as the hand-cut large-type font made by the sailors in the titles “TURNED HEAD!” and “MAGICAL FIGURES” and “BOMBASTES FURIOSO!!!”

This heterogeneity of material reflects, in part, the novelty of the practice of Arctic printing and the attendant desire to preserve souvenirs on fancier fabric. The National Maritime Museum, for instance, holds several playbills printed on brightly colored silk that had been elaborately framed for display by their mid-nineteenth-century preservationists. The relative volume of such commemorative souvenir production is a primary reason such playbills remain in the “Uncatalogued” or “Miscellaneous” folders of prominent expedition members.

The elusiveness of this material reflects, for one, the ephemerality of a moment in time, a season, an expedition carried out in the absence of diurnal measurements of days, abstracted from contact with the state sponsors of most ventures other than via the singular national time kept by sea clocks.
keyed to the Greenwich meridian. Rather than a mechanism for passing time, newspapers, as well as letters and logbooks, become a measurement and codification of it. In addition, the elusiveness of polar periodicals within archives is consistent with the imperfect preservation histories of periodicals more generally, especially for amateur publications or those created by nonelites.67 These media were never designed to stay, to stick, to make it to the shelf; they were as transitory as the ship or the ice, always on the move.

In their newspaper incarnations, polar ecomedia bear affinities in some ways with the amateur periodicals of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Both were enabled by the wide availability of desktop printing presses, which gave nonprofessionals access to parlor (or cabin) publica-
tion. Small presses were initially manufactured for use by tradesmen looking to economize on job printing costs, but as Elizabeth Harris describes, “almost as an afterthought, manufacturers advertised the same apparatus [do-it-yourself printing presses] to children and amateur printers.” Hobby presses were a hit; between 1860 and 1880 the “number of press-making companies tripled.”68 Tabletop presses in the home were used primarily to print calling cards or other social documents, but younger people—mostly white, middle-class boys—used the presses to create their own newspapers. We see an example of this dual function in the Boys and Girls Favorite, an amateur paper out of Grand Rapids, Michigan. One “prize” for a reader who could furnish twenty-five additional subscribers to the paper was a “beautiful printing press for boys and girls, worked by hand, Cards, Handbills, Circulars, in fact, all kinds of printing can be done with neatness and dispatch. Just the thing all boys and girls want. Given for twenty-five new names.”69 The process of generating new subscribers to the paper was also a process of generating new outlets for print, both periodical and social.

We see some of the differences between amateur periodicals of the temperate and polar zones on display in the career of Isaac Israel Hayes, who had experience with recreational papers both as an Arctic explorer and as a surgeon in Pennsylvania. He had first traveled to the Far North with his fellow Philadelphian doctor-turned-polar-explorer Elisha Kent Kane on the 1853 Second Grinnell Expedition in search of Franklin’s lost ships, and when Hayes returned from his own command of an 1860–61 Arctic expedition, he found that the United States was engaged in the Civil War. He became the surgeon in charge of Satterlee Hospital in West Philadelphia, the large Union medical center known for treating thousands of casualties from the battle of Gettysburg. There Hayes established a library as well as a hospital newspaper—written and printed by convalescing soldiers—for the sake of their mental health and amusement. According to an article in its first number entitled “Our Printers,” the West Philadelphia Hospital Register “is printed and published, within the walls of the Hospital.—The type is set up, and the press-work performed by Soldiers, whose names are given below.—convalescent patients, partially disabled by service in the field.”70 The West Philadelphia Hospital Register describes a lecture course (a general midcentury amusement also popular aboard polar ventures), and the first topic was a familiar one: “The Surgeon in Charge [Hayes] will inaugurate the course by a Lecture on the Arctic Regions.” (Subsequent lecture topics similarly trended heavily toward Arctic themes.)71 There was at least one crucial distinction between the West Philadelphia Hospital
Register, however, and the two Arctic newspapers with which Hayes had been associated (the Ice-Blink of Kane’s Second Grinnell Expedition and the Port Foulke Weekly News of Hayes’s own command of the United States). A fundamental aspect of U.S. amateur newspaper publishing in the second half of the nineteenth century was exchange, the process by which publishers of small-circulation sheets sent copies of their papers to other amateurs in expectation of returns in kind. This custom was facilitated, in part, by very low postage rates for newspapers. The second issue of the West Philadelphia Hospital Register reported, “We have the pleasure of welcoming, already, a number of newspaper exchanges, which are placed immediately into the hands of eager readers. We tender to our brethren of the quill (scalpel) our affectionate greetings.”

Other medical institutions had papers as well, as Benjamin Reiss’s work on asylums in the period reveals; the Opal of the New York State Lunatic Asylum in Utica (which began publication in 1851) exchanged with 330 other periodicals. Exchanges were not practicable, of course, for Arctic papers, or for shipboard papers more generally. In this way the ship circulates differently than other supposedly heterotopic spaces, such as the prison.

In the 1870s and 1880s in the United States the amateur journalism trade was remarkably robust. There are fifty-five thousand amateur newspapers in the American Antiquarian Society’s holdings alone, the great majority produced by teenage boys—comprising the first teenage print subculture, Lara Langer Cohen has argued. Cohen’s work with this particular archive has revealed that much of the content of the late nineteenth-century American amateur newspapers was tedious, repetitive, and largely beside the point. “Instead of creating an outlet for one’s own thoughts,” she writes, “it appears that one started an amateur newspaper to join a community of other amateurs. This community is not just an effect of print, as has often been argued of other print cultures. Community is also the cause of print.” Cohen’s latter point equally applies to polar print cultures. The audience for amateur newspapers, she continues, “largely seems to have consisted of other amateurs.”

Amateur papers achieved an audience of their fellows by participating in cultures of exchange; many hobby papers printed within their own pages the titles of the papers with whom they were in an exchange relationship. An amateur paper published in the port town of New Bedford, Massachusetts, took the obligations of exchange particularly seriously; an editorial statement in the first number of Shells and Seaweed promised, “We will exchange with all amateur publications. No sample copy fiends need apply, unless their request be accompanied by a stamp.”
A concern about the “fiends” who request sample copies without sharing in kind pops up again and again in its pages; what seems monstrous about such fiends is their nonparticipation in a print culture based on reciprocity. Concerns about nonreciprocity were central to the first Arctic newspaper, the *North Georgia Gazette, and Winter Chronicle* (1819–20). But it preceded *Shells and Seaweed* (1884)—and indeed the amateur journalism movement—by over a half century. While polar newspapers share many generic and technological affinities with the amateur boys’ newspapers of the late nineteenth century, they were not directly inspired by them, nor by the papers of the English public schools, which also postdate the first Arctic papers. Indeed a great number of naval officers left school early to go to sea. One officer on Parry’s first expedition wrote in a private letter about the ship’s manuscript newspaper, the *North Georgia Gazette, and Winter Chronicle*, “When it is considered at what an early period the officers of the navy are sent to sea generally at eleven or twelve years of age and that the education which they receive on board can scarcely be supposed to be on the best or most enlarged plan it will we think be admitted that many of the papers in the North Georgia Gazette are far superior to what might reasonably be expected and such as would not discredit the more regular scholar and practised writer.”

Newspapers were part of a culture of periodical publication that flourished in Britain and the United States over the course of the nineteenth century. In Adriana Craciun’s account, polar exploration more broadly benefited from an expansion of print in the period. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, British Arctic expeditions produced published narratives as part of a formalized relationship with the London publisher John Murray; in turn, “the voyage account authored by the ship’s captain [became] increasingly important to the business of exploration.” As the scholars Craciun, Janice Cavell, and Russell Potter have documented, Arctic expeditions in the second half of the nineteenth century generated enormous media attention, particularly in response to the search for Franklin’s missing expedition. Thus while the newspapers printed by polar expedition members aboard ship during sunless, ice-stalled winters were not direct analogues to the broadsheets of the temperate metropoles, they were enabled in some ways by similar impulses.

In publishing their news in polar periodicals, as I have been arguing, Arctic explorers were, in part, seeking to re-create the forms of temporal regularity and imagined community that newspapers have historically been understood to serve in the period—only in this instance doing so in extravagantly outlandish conditions. The process of printing their news and
engaging in the satiric imagination of its broader periodical circulation offered expedition members a particular manner of inhabiting and reflecting upon the genre of their literary production, one that emphasized their ecologically extreme perspective and acknowledged their ephemerality within that space and time.

Polar Imprints

Putting thoughts to words and words to print reverberates in other ways, as well. The dedications and apologia in the opening numbers of polar papers make strong claims for what one paper called an “intellectual revolution” among seamen. (They also make claims for the mental health benefits provided by the amusements of periodical play, as chapter 2 discusses in more detail.) According to the Aurora Borealis, “the general public appear to have no conception” of sailors’ nonmanual skills. “The popular opinion seems to be, that the literary attainments of British sailors seldom exceed the acquisition of some boisterous song, and that only the very erudite amongst them can succeed in scrawling a letter to their friends at home.” To the contrary, the paper of the Assistance continues:

[Here] we find articles written by veteran tars, whose home since boyhood has been upon the sea, that would not disgrace the pages of some of our magazines. These men with frames of iron, with a courage and a stern endurance that nothing can subdue, show themselves possessed of a delicacy of imagination and a power of perception that one has great difficulty in reconciling with the honest roughness of their appearance. . . . The men from before the mast, who contributed to the “Aurora Borealis,” are amongst the most exemplary in Her Majesty’s service. 81

The men “before the mast” are the common seamen aboard ship, the nonofficers and the “veteran tars,” whose literacy rates were notably high for a laboring class. 82 To be sure, it is in an expedition’s self-interest to promote a view of common sailors as powerful in mind as well as body, even in a document for internal circulation. But the evidence bears out the periodical’s claims. The Nares expedition of 1875–76, for example, consisted of two ships of sixty men each. During the Arctic winter the ships established a school for sailors, which included instruction in navigation and history. “Only two men out of the entire ship’s company were unable to read and write,” recalls Markham, “and these two men were placed in a class with two
others, who were unable to read and write English.” (The nonreaders in English were from Denmark and Gibraltar.) The literacy class “was presided over by the doctor, who kindly volunteered to devote himself to the instruction of the ‘cripples,’ as they were facetiously called.” Such facetiousness indicates that their illiteracy was relatively unusual. The elite Markham found himself impressed by the knowledge and intellectual curiosity he found among the common seamen with whom he fraternized during his Arctic voyaging. “I was much surprised at the extensive Arctic knowledge which they possessed,” he wrote, “showing that they had read largely on this subject, and were anxious to learn yet more.” There was also a makeshift academy and a Reading Room on the Assistance during the immobilized inactivity and darkness of polar winter. In addition to working on the paper *Aurora Borealis*, the men of the “lower deck” (that is, the seamen) organized themselves into “schools on the Lancasterian system,” in which the stronger students taught the less able; subjects included navigation, steam, seamanship, arithmetic, and even modern languages and music. Sherard Osborn, who commanded a support tender for the *Resolute* and *Assistance* Franklin search ships in 1850–51, merrily recollected the sight of “tough old marines curving ‘pothooks and hangers’ [practicing their letters], as if their very lives depended on their performances, with an occasional burst of petulance, such as, ‘D—the pen, it won’t write! I beg pardon, sir; this ’ere pen will splutter!’ which set the scholars in a roar.” The biological discipline at work here is regulatory but directed more immediately toward personal community than state imperatives.

In the *Aurora Borealis* “articles were contributed by the commanders, officers and men, of the expedition. Some of the papers are from the pen of the venerable Admiral Sir John Ross, and others, and not the least interesting, are from rough and weather-beaten tars before the mast.” George Murray, a quartermaster or petty supply agent, was judged the “best writer” among those contributing to the *Aurora Borealis*. This nautical class-leveling was common in post-1848 Arctic papers. The prolific printer aboard the Belcher expedition, for example, was a seaman named H. Briant, rated “musician”; he contributed poems to the *Queen’s Illuminated Magazine* in addition to his printing work. We see the literal mark of his labor in an inky fingerprint left at the bottom of a proof sheet from one of the expedition’s official dispatches, a blank cairn record, preserved in the British Admiralty Records.

One of the great archival pleasures of the text of this project has been just such encounters with the mark of the hand of labor upon the material of mechanized production, however limited in its industrial scope. Briant’s
fingertip, a hand-stitched folded hem on a pink silk-printed Arctic song composed on ship, a broken tooth enclosed with a commemorative printed menu: these flaws or remnants constitute less errata or variant than aide-mémoire of the exceptional intimacy within which the extremity of these printed texts were produced. As the labor of letterpress printing itself was generally trade work, it is not surprising that seamen would be involved in typesetting and working the shipboard presses. Key within an Arctic context, though, is how frequently officers and men were working the presses side by side, creating different forms of naval and textual community. Able Seaman Symons of the Alert on the Nares expedition also acted as a printer and contributor, standing shoulder to shoulder with a lieutenant, Giffard. The sister ship of the Alert likewise had a press, and on the Discovery Able Seaman Benjamin Wyatt was the printer. The Scott Polar Research Institute holds a printed “Education Sheet” from the Discovery expedition, presumably designed to give the printers some practice in setting type. In it we see how the men are using the medium of print to work through the terms of their maritime experience. The sheet runs through the alphabet, assigning a word to each letter according to custom—but several of the nonstandard word choices reveal something about the tastes and backgrounds of the printers: “And.Bee.Cat.Dog.Ear.Fig.Gin.Hop.Inn.Jug.Kit.Loo.Man.Noon.Oil.Pence.Quay.Rot.Sin.Tin.Urn.Vex.Win.Yes.Zinc.” While the first five
or six words might be examples used by any schoolchild in practicing alphabet words, contributions such as “gin,” “loo,” “quay,” “rot,” and “sin” show a kind of louche devolution better associated with working seamen. The nautical class known as the “men” printed on many other expeditions as well. Kane’s *Ice-Blink* (1853–54; Second Grinnell Expedition, a Franklin search) was composed by “authors of every nautical grade: some of the best from the forecastle.” Rochfort Maguire notes in his diary of his time on the *Plover*, “In the Printing department a man named Daw a Seaman, is making himself very useful [in helping to produce the *Weekly Guy*].” On the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition of 1903–5, the *Arctic Eagle* was printed by the “assistant commissary steward, the youngest man in the field department; the compositor [was] Seaman Montrose, who had been a wandering newspaper typo before he took to following the sea.” A woodcut formed a special cover for the *Arctic Eagle* to commemorate Christmas in 1903; it shows the ice-beset ship in the background and two expedition members raising brimming goblets in the foreground, sled dogs at their feet. The engraving was created with a “chisel and pocketknife by [the ship’s] assistant scientist porter.”

When Arctic newspapers were not offering testimony in support of the cultural bona fides of their crewmen in earnest, edifying tones, they were doing so in the very spirit of fun and frolic with which the periodicals were launched. The publishing schedule of the *Arctic Eagle* was “whenever convenient”; the “maiden effort” of the paper was designed as a “flyer; feeler, as it were, to test the market for such a paper among the reading public of Franz Josef Land.” The public for the unpopulated Far Northern Russian archipelago was, of course, constituted solely by the crew of the ship, as the *Eagle* acknowledges: “We can confidently assert . . . that it is the only paper in six hundred miles.” Such was the case with all Arctic periodicals, even as they might jestingly have an eye on other markets. “We fear not the frowns of the Temperate Zone,” the prefatory matter to the *Illustrated Arctic News* states, for these Far North newsmen, “being of a peaceable disposition, would deprecate wrath, or jealousy on the part of the Titans of the Southern Press, who may fear our entering the field as competitors in these Regions.” While London printers are certainly “Titans,” especially compared to amateurs on the *Resolute*, the southerliness of their northern European location is globally relative. The *Illustrated Arctic News* continues its sport by assuring the printers of the metropole that “unless Old England be overtaken by a night of three months duration, it is not our intention to appear again in the Editorial line.” This self-deprecation makes claims for
the legitimacy of the seamen’s publications in positioning the *Illustrated Arctic News* as an object for jealousy or competition, however impudently.

One basis for this comparison, or this sense of competition with London or other metropolitan papers, may be the fact that shipboard clocks are synchronized with Greenwich Mean Time for longitudinal location purposes. Moored in Arctic ice for months or years, expeditions were navigationally tethered to the prime meridian, even as their daily lives were synchronized to polar temporalities, displaced by many meridians. The editors of polar newspapers recognize that one expectation of contemporary media, however, is to erase such temporal distinctions in the name of broader and swifter communication. As the preface to a collection of articles from the *Aurora Borealis* explains, “A great paper like the [London] ‘Times’ no longer addresses itself to one empire or to a single people. The telegraph and the railroad have destroyed space, and a truth now uttered in London in a few minutes later vibrates through the heart of France, or is heard on the shores of the Adriatic.” Yet even as the *Aurora Borealis* served as the “public organ of the little world” constituted by “Captain Austin’s squadron in the Arctic Seas,” that little world itself was not networked with U.S. or European spheres of communication; the “truths” published in this Arctic organ resonate only among the members of Austin’s ships. “We fear that the time is far distant,” the preface concludes, “before ‘the peoples’ of Europe will feel any of the brotherly spirit which animated ‘the Austin Happy Family.’” Dispersed European “peoples” cannot share the intimacy of the expeditionary “family” unit, for one. But the sentiment also underscores a different point: as an example of ecomedia, the *Aurora Borealis* is networked with the polar region, not with the temperate world. Note, too, that the preface to the *Aurora Borealis* selections stresses that “the time is far distant” when such networks might be joined: the Arctic is figured as both temporally and spatially extreme.

Yet even in their acknowledgment of the distance of the Arctic papers from the printing centers of the “Temperate Zone,” both in their geographic location and in their fabrication, polar periodicals hew to literary formal expectations. In their dedications, preambles, and preludes, for example, Arctic newspapers offer the kind of conventional apologia familiar to readers of first-person narratives, even as they recognize how unusual their periodicals were, relatively speaking. “We follow the custom of our brethren of the quill,” the preamble to the *Arctic Moon* (of Adolphus Greely’s American Lady Franklin Bay Expedition, 1881–84) observes, “who generally devote a column of their first issue of a newspaper—like the preface to
a book—in whys and wherefores, in the way of an apology for introducing themselves upon the public.” Published semimonthly (at a waggish list price of 25¢ per issue) from Fort Conger in Grinnell Land (lat 81°44′, long 64°45′), the Arctic Moon invited “articles in poetry or prose, short or long, serious or facetious.” As the musical ability of the expedition members is relatively poor, the author of the preamble admits, “we have more than ordinary justifications in prescribing, the Arctic Moon twice a month during the days of darkness,” since the expedition’s “predecessors in the realm of the ice king have long ago established the precedent” of a shipboard newspaper.98 The apologia that prefaced the earlier Illustrated Arctic News (1850), the precedent-setters mentioned in the Arctic Moon, had recognized that paradox in claiming novelty in the production of an all-too-familiar periodical form. Using the conventions of publishing to argue for its lack of convention, in other words, the Illustrated Arctic News had made this part of the paper’s raison d’être: “Where merit cannot be pleaded, novelty, as in Bloomerism, may avail.”99 A periodical in the Arctic was as dislocatingly out of place as Bloomers or pants were on a woman; both became Anglo-American fads in the 1850s nevertheless. The Weekly Guy in 1852 had been billed as a curiosity: “ANOTHER NOVELTY!!!”100 The expedition’s initial novelty had been an Inuit dance, also advertised via printed playbill—albeit only as a “GREAT NOVELTY!!,” with two exclamation points rather than three. (A journal kept by a crew member observes, “The Notice headed ‘Great Novelty’ was turned out of hand by the Compositors in a very creditable form, but they regret that they have not four times the number of types.”)101 It did not take long for exceptional novelties to become expectations, commonplaces aboard Arctic ships. But this is a function of nautical practice: when a method or technique is effective or an improvement upon former custom, it becomes regularized in common. We have seen already how one ship responded to a dearth of fonts—they carved their own. “Whatever is wanting, we must endeavour to supply,” the advertisement for the Queen’s Illuminated Magazine states. These needs include “A Morning Paper and its Latest intelligence! . . . Periodicals Papers &c, where will they come from if not created by our selves? . . . The Printing Press has been we fear, but little appreciated, by the sagacious if not intelligent inhabitants of these realms, and North Cornwall, has not had as yet its Caxton.” (William Caxton was the fifteenth-century merchant, writer, and printer who introduced the first printing press to England in 1476.)102

The printedness of words had its own ecological value to expedition members, both as a mark of the degree and quality of Arctic light and as
a gauge of their distance from comparative comfort. It was common on expeditions to judge the degree of winter darkness by whether or not it was possible to read a copy of a newspaper at noon. During the Second Grinnell Expedition, Kane wrote in his journal on 14 January 1855 that it was “growing lighter,” a relief, as it “has now been fifty-two days since we could read [newspaper] type, even after climbing the dreary hills.” With the disappearance of the sun in 1875 during the Nares expedition, the commander recalled, the “noon twilight was insufficient to enable us to make out the words in a ‘Times’ leading article, when the paper was held up facing the south.” Nares then calculated with some grimness, “We have yet
eighty-seven days of more intense darkness to pass through.” Late January “raised the spirits” of those on the expedition, as each day brought “an increased arch of twilight. . . . At noon of the 28th we were able to read on the floe a few lines from the leading article of the ‘Times.’” Edward Moss’s account of this expedition adds texture to Nares’s account: “The words ‘Epps’s Cocoa,’ in type nearly half-an-inch long, were easily read, but the ‘breakfast’ in small type between them was utterly illegible. It was just possible to spell out ‘Oetzmann’ in clear Roman type five-sixteenths of an inch long; and after much staring at the page, held close before the eyes, we managed to make out ‘great novelty’ in type one-fourth of an inch long.” Moss also gives an example in large font, bold type of what is “LEGIBLE AT MID-DAY.” The Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen also used the newspaper-sunlight gauge on his Fram expedition; on 27 January his crew could “just see to read Verdens Gang [The Course of the World, a Norwegian newspaper] about midday.”

Why did the form of the newspaper serve as the standard for gauging polar solar radiance? The small type of newsprint may have been variable across the nineteenth century, but it provided a familiar measure across ships and over time; more light is required to read tiny type, naturally. The leading article of the Times of London, used by the Nares expedition in 1876, appeared in what today we would measure as six-point font. Newspapers were cheap, widely available, disposable, and carried on virtually all ships, making them an accessible basis for comparison. More evocatively, papers are tied directly to the sun’s rise and fall. In temperate latitudes, periodicals are generally daily, diurnal; whether in morning or evening editions, their temporality is irrevocably linked with the sun’s periodicity. In employing a newsprint light meter for polar practice, expedition members acknowledge both the expectations of printedness and its daily practices, and their estrangement from it. Printed text, and its scarcity, becomes a marker for the distance between temperate latitudinal regularity and polar latitudinal extremity: If a daily paper has no daily sun by which to be read, are days still a measure of time?—of information?

Printedness represents different things at different times in the polar regions, however. George E. Tyson’s diary of his survival of the Polaris expedition achingly records the loss of the ship’s store of books after he and eighteen others are separated from the leaking ship:

No Bible, no Prayer-book, no magazines or newspapers—not even a Harper’s Weekly—was saved by any one, though there are almost always
Tyson is counting the days since he has seen printed words. What does this longing for print represent when expressed by someone actually adrift in the Arctic, untethered from ship or shelter? His lament is all the more striking in the face of the extremity of his condition: he wrote these words while on a diminishing ice floe upon which the nineteen Polaris survivors—refugees after the murder of their ship’s captain, Charles Francis Hall, and the loss of their ship—traveled eighteen hundred miles over six months before their rescue. They survived on seal that their Inuit companions were able to hunt from the floe, and on the few stores they managed to salvage from the ship. No one, apparently, salvaged the Harper’s Weekly. And yet what Tyson highlights is the very ephemerality of print in temperate latitudes, which people who do not happen to be on a loose floe in the Arctic are “wasting and destroying.” In this instance print is a stabilizing, regulatory entity, its neat ruled lines in fixed contrast to the errancy of the movement of the Polaris survivors.

Print is likewise a “comfort” to Fridtjof Nansen and his crew, and not just when it is visible by the light of the returning sun. When Nansen and his men leave their ship and are camped in their winter quarters for the dark season, they pine for printed matter: “How we longed for a book! . . . The little readable matter which was to be found in our navigation-table and almanack I had read so many times already that I knew it almost by heart. . . . Yet it was always a comfort to see these books; the sight of the printed letters gave one a feeling that there was after all a little bit of the civilized man left.”

There is no human Other invoked in this passage to provide a supposed “savage” counterpart to the “civilized man” Nansen imagines; the erosion of civilization in the Arctic is instead conflated with a loss of access to readable print. What is important to note in both Tyson’s and Nansen’s situations is that neither has access to a printing press and thus cannot readily produce new forms of printed ecomedia. Tyson is in desperate survival mode on an ice floe that is breaking up; Nansen’s physical location is less tenuous, but his expedition does not have a press, although
it does produce the manuscript newspaper *Framsjaa*. Their distress is thus especially keen.

For those expeditions that did have access to presses, though, the polar regions still presented many challenges. The following section describes how polar ice, often evoked in imaginative conjurations of polar spaces or Arctic sublimes in this period, was often a deterrent to textual creation in polar spaces themselves. The printed and other textual media that expedition members ultimately produce are polar ecomedia in the sense that they account for—reflect or incorporate in some way—the very icy conditions in which they were produced, despite manifest hardships.

*Ice! Ice!! Ice!!! Is the Handwriting on the Wall*

Arctic printing had its mechanical privations, some of which might be readily imagined. Resupplying the press was not an option in the Far North. On the Franklin search ships *Assistance* and *Resolute* printing became “so great a passion” that “at length their stock of paper was run out.” The variable range and quality of the materials on which playbills and other ephemera were printed—linen, cloth, silk, oiled paper, chamois—also suggests the limited range of supplies aboard ship, although those substrates were likely also used to create commemorative copies. The extreme cold was an issue as well. Frozen ink had to be melted for each printing session. (An ingenious solution to this problem was invented by the American Charles Francis Hall in maintaining his journals in −40°; it is described in chapter 5.) A note appended to a theatrical playbill by the printer Briant during Belcher’s expedition alerted the crew to this contingency: “N.B.—The business of the Printing Office is considerably retarded, in consequence of the ink freezing on the rollers.—Printer’s Devil.” So widely recognized a consequence of Arctic printing was frozen ink and other writing materials that the circumstance could be invoked for comic effect, as it was in one article, “Departure of the Travelling Parties,” a mock diary detailing the brutal conditions experienced by sledging teams while establishing forward depots of provisions: “The M.S.S. here ceases in consequence of the Ink having become solid, an evil which might have been remedied, had not the pencils been already used for fuel.” The same article sardonically reports that on 3 October the party “awoke, horribly hot—Ther. −17°.” The punchline is that −17° is far warmer than conditions had been for the men, working usually in temperatures below −50°. (Temperatures are given in Fahrenheit unless otherwise
indicated.) Extreme temperatures in Antarctica had an effect on the very color of the ink used to illustrate the caricatures in *The Blizzard*, the lighter sister publication to the *South Polar Times* on Scott’s 1901–4 Discovery expedition: “The severe weather . . . has even affected the ink used in printing, changing it from blue to green, and from green to purple; so if [caricature subjects] do not see the delicate contour, the regular features, and the noble expression that their looking glasses would lead them to expect . . . they must blame the low temperatures which have of late affected the office machinery.”\(^{113}\) Ink was not the only artistic pigment in demand; in fashioning sets for the Arctic theatricals aboard *Assistance*, for example—a ship on which there was “a scarcity of paint”—the resident artist had to improvise paint combinations: “He was reduced to mixtures of ‘Day and Martin,’ black ink, black-lead, whitening, washing blue, glue, and other unusual ingredients, consisting of chimney-soot and lamp-black, to complete his picture.”\(^{114}\) There may not have been a rich palette of paint colors aboard this particular Arctic mission, but the officers at least had shined shoes, as the reference to the shoe polish brand Day & Martin indicates.

These were not conditions conducive to writing. “I daily applied myself to mental work,” wrote Adolphus Greely, yet “the ink froze nightly at my head.”\(^{115}\) A reader of the *Weekly Guy* (the paper for the *Plover*, 1852) wrote to the paper’s editor, “I would fain be a contributor to the pages of your periodical,” but the sunless winter of their icebound world was an obstacle to inspiration rather than its source: “The hoar winter here conceals from sight / All pleasing objects which to verse invite.”\(^{116}\) There was nothing particularly inspirational about such extreme conditions for Hayes. “Our readers no doubt think it very funny to write an Editorial; thermometer below zero, ink frozen, imagination congealed, memory gone with the summer; thoughts in the sunny south, and feet wrapped up in furs. But there’s no fun about it,” he complained in the *Port Foulke Weekly News*. “The editor has a very uneasy chair. His bed is not a bed of roses, but a bed of ice. He eats ice, he drinks ice and he even smells ice. . . . Ice! Ice!! Ice!!! is the handwriting on the wall:—The ‘mene, mene, tekel upharsin’ of the Arctic Editorial Belshazzar.”\(^{117}\) There will be no futurity in human underestimation of the dominion of ice, Hayes’s biblical analogy makes clear.

Ice was destructive to literary cultures in more secular ways, too. Shipboard condensation was an ongoing problem throughout nineteenth-century polar exploration history. Because the interior of the ship was warmer than the exterior, human breath would freeze and the walls would
sweat, forming clouds of icy vapor or thin sheets of ice that had to be chipped away. In a scrapbook photo kept by Anton Vedoe of the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition, ice crystals appear thickly clustered on the beams above and alongside the men; the ice looks like badly fraying contemporary asbestos fibers or fiberglass insulation.118 “Every week or ten days throughout the winter we had to remove from our cabins the ice caused by the condensation of the moist air where it came in contact with the cool outer walls,” recalls Robert Peary. “Behind every article of furniture near the outer wall the ice would form, and we used to chop it out from under our bunks by the pailful.”119 Such was the trade-off for having temperatures above freezing in the cabins of the ship; condensation produced the great “annoyance” of “the incessant drip in our cabins and elsewhere on board.” The “disagreeable drip” was destructive to books and paper, naturally, and they had to be removed from shelves and any position in which they might come into contact with the ship’s sides or beams. Markham found it “decidedly unpleasant, whilst writing, to have a continual stream of water pouring down upon your head and upon your paper.” One of his messmates, however, “had brought an umbrella with him, and this being spread over his chair protected him from the wet, and thus enabled him to read or write in comparative comfort.”120 A sound plan, indeed, even as one questions why an umbrella would be a necessary item to bring to a High Arctic expedition. When paired with the shoe polish, these trappings of gentlemanly custom show one aspect of maladaptation of British expeditionary preparation to local conditions. A more utilitarian nautical supply might have been a locker for the ship’s library. As David H. Stam has shown, on two of his expeditions Peary brought loan libraries in wooden cases that had been provided by the American Seamen’s Friend Society.121 But as Peary’s narrative suggests, even lockers did not prevent damage to books caused by condensation: “Books were always placed far forward on the shelves, because if a book were pushed back it would freeze solid to the wall. Then, if a warmer day came, or a fire was built in the cabin, the ice would melt, the water would run down and the leaves of the book would mold.”122

In such non–climate controlled conditions, other book arts were necessarily practiced as well. The doctor on Fridtjof Nansen’s expedition sets up a bookbindery, “greatly patronized by the Fram’s library”; this becomes a necessity both on account of condensation and because “several books that are in constant circulation, such as Gjest Baardsen’s Liv og Levnet, etc., etc., are in a very bad state.” (Gjest Baardsen was a notorious early nineteenth-century Norwegian thief and escape artist, and this volume, his autobiog-
raphy, was very popular.) The most extensive trade in the book arts aboard ship, however, is the “manufacture of diaries,” Nansen writes, of which every sailor is a producer.\textsuperscript{123}

In addition to diary writing and the requisite shipboard recordkeeping and journaling, expedition members supplemented their store of theatrical texts by composing their own.\textsuperscript{124} A partial list of plays performed in the Arctic follows, organized in rough chronological order and divided into two generic categories. I have culled this list from playbills, polar periodicals, and voyage narratives; those designated with an asterisk were composed by expedition members aboard ship:

**Farce/Comedy**

*The North West Passage: or, the Voyage Finished* (*Hecla and Griper*)\textsuperscript{125}

Miss in Her Teens (*Hecla and Griper*)

The Liar (*Hecla and Griper*)

The Citizen (*Hecla and Griper*)

*A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (*Hecla and Griper*)

The Mayor of Garratt (*Hecla and Griper*)

Bon Ton; or, *High Life above Stairs* (*Hecla and Griper*)

Heir-at-Law (*Hecla and Griper*)

Queer Subject (*Plover*)

The Original (*Plover*)

*Fun, Foolery, Frolic, and Mirth* (*Amphitrite*)

Box and Cox (*Amphitrite and London*)

King Glumpus (*Investigator*)

Raising the Wind (*Investigator*)

Slasher and Crasher (*Assistance and London*)

*Arctic Pantomime of Zero, or Harlequin Light* (*Resolute and Assistance*)\textsuperscript{126}

Who Speaks First? (*Resolute*)

The Scapegrace (*Assistance*)

The Irish Tutor (*Assistance*)

The Silent Woman (*Assistance*)

Turned Head (*Assistance*)
Bombastes Furioso (Assistance)
Married Life (Assistance)
The Lottery Ticket (Assistance)
Legerdemain (Intrepid)
Taming [of] the Shrew (Resolute)
The Two Bonnycastles (Resolute)
* The Countryman (Advance)
The Blue Devils (Advance)
* Little Vulgar Boy, or Weeping Bill (Alert) 127
* The Arctic Twin (Alert)
* The Ice-Bound Regions (Alert) 128
The Chops of the Channel (Alert)
Catch a Weasel (Alert)
Aladdin, or The Wonderful Scamp (Alert)
Vilikins and His Dinah (Alert)
Area Belle (Alert)
Money Makes the Mare Go (Jeannette)
The Siamese Twins (Jeannette)
The Irish Schoolmaster (Jeannette)

HISTORY/TRAGEDY/DRAMA

Hamlet (Assistance)
Charles the Twelfth [A Night with Charles XII. of Sweden, or, A Soldier’s Wife’s Fidelity] (Resolute and Assistance)

Nearly all theatrical performances aboard expedition ships were of one-act farces of the nineteenth century. Many were comedies of manners, and their situational humor may have come, in part, from the opportunity they afforded sailors to cross-dress and engage in various acts of class, gender, and ethnic transgression. They were hugely popular with the crew members, despite open-air performance temperatures that could range in the teens. 129 Arctic plays written in situ were themselves farces, reflecting this distinct generic preference. They include Arctic Pantomime of Zero, or Harlequin Light, a farce featuring evil sprites named Frost-Bite, Scorbutus, and
Hunger. “Turning all the dangers and inconveniences to which we are exposed in these inhospitable climates into evil spirits that are leagued against us,” the farce stages those malign spirits as “continually watching every opportunity to surprise an unfortunate travelling party, till at length their power is destroyed by the appearance of the more puissant good spirits, Sun and Daylight.”

It proved a hit; the Royal Arctic Theatre performed the *Pantomime of Zero* on a number of occasions, according to extant playbills. The “original pathetico-comico-burlesque operetta” *Little Vulgar Boy*, written by Chaplain William Pullen (“poet-laureate” of the Nares expedition), was a dramatic adaptation of a poem in *The Ingolsby Legends*, a popular midcentury collection of folk tales and ghost stories. And on Parry’s first expedition, when the ship’s scanty stock of plays had been run through, Parry wrote a five-act musical entitled *The North West Passage: or, the Voyage Finished*. Its plot described the expedition’s hoped-for progress through the Bering Straits (which would have meant achieving the Northwest Passage, which the expedition did not in fact accomplish) and a return home to the Prince of Wales pub to regale their sweethearts with stories of their exertions. The very few dramas or histories performed by polar voyagers seem to reflect either those works’ exceptional popularity or familiarity, in the case of *Hamlet*, or a theme of spousal fidelity that would resonate with men on a long voyage.

A talent for dramatic composition and interest in the genre more generally is in line with the observations recorded in the “Literature and Art” column of the *Port Foulke Weekly News*, produced by Hayes’s *United States North Pole* expedition. On that venture too “there is an evident preference for dramatic entertainments.” Second Mate Henry Dodge, the literature columnist and coeditor of the paper, continues the “Literature and Art” report by noting that the general “taste in literary matters is not inclined to the religious or to the fictitious;—A large invoice of both this class of books having been packed away on Friday morning, as unmarketable.” Dodge’s own tastes, according to Commander Hayes, esteemed periodicals over religious works, fiction, or plays; by earlier November 1860 the editor had “already consumed several boxes of ‘Littell’s Living Age’ and the ‘Westminster Review.’” Dodge’s periodic excess registered not just in literature: he was a notorious drunk, according to private diaries kept by several expedition members, even if this behavior is not documented in Hayes’s *Open Polar Sea*. (This discrepancy between expeditionary accounts demonstrates that official voyage narratives rarely, if ever, give the full story of personnel
matters.) His alcohol abuse did not interfere with his work for the expedition newspaper, though; Dodge was a frequent and talented contributor.

In a provocative and bitingly funny “Literature” column in the *Port Foulke Weekly News* with which I will close this chapter, Dodge writes, “We are such an enlightened set of mortals that Books are unnecessary either for our amusement, or knowledge.” In fact, Dodge writes blithely, “we know enough.” Demonstrating their collective knowledge, he boasts:

We all know who wrote Shakespeare; we all know that John Bunyon wrote Paradise Lost; we all know that Napoleon Bonaparte was the greatest general of his age, until he was defeated by Caesar the Great, who in his turn was defeated by General Walker, who is now the greatest man alive. We all know that in 1942 a man by the name of Columbus discovered the New World, in a small vessel called the “Great Eastern,” and that he opposed the landing of the Pilgrims, in which engagement he was killed. . . .

What, then, is the use of books? It is a great deal better to employ our time in learning the art of spinning yarns, and in acquiring a knowledge of the valuable sciences of “cribble,” “faro,” “vinget et un,” “Kimi, &c.” . . .

Then who cares for books; is it not better to be able to amuse “my mess” with yarns, which are of old standing, may be a hundred years old (in which of course “I” am the principle actor) than to be able to answer our “learned Astronomer” why we have so many successive months of darkness and light here? Of course it is! Then overboard with the books! who cares for “general information”? Not I! I would rather read one copy of the “N. Y. Ledger” or “Clipper,” than the whole ships company’s collection of books.134

Within the pages of a ship’s newspaper, Dodge elevates the value of newspapers over books. He cites as proof of the exhaustion of books’ value the sufficiency of knowledge gained by the crew of the *United States*. But their knowledge is, of course, inaccurate, comically so. Instead sailors trust their own yarn spinning, storytelling practices. Dodge is wittily playing with the idea of sailor knowledge—what I have called maritime epistemology or the “sea eye” and what Margaret Cohen has called sailors’ “know how”—as more properly the province of experience and oral history than abstract book knowledge.135 Yet Dodge’s humor is also at the expense of the kind of information that newspapers provide, and in this sense he anticipates Walter Benjamin’s well-traveled sailor-storyteller, long on experience and ill-served by “general information.” Yet for Dodge (unlike Benjamin), the
impoverished media form providing unwelcome information is books rather than the newspapers that Dodge embraces.

Dodge’s “Literature” column stresses the communal vividness of sailor forms of narrative media and the collective experience represented therein. In the case of the Port Foulke Weekly News of Hayes’s United States expedition, and the papers of polar expeditions more broadly, the challenge of collective experience is building and representing community in geophysical and climatic extremity. The printing press became a tool in facing that challenge.