

J. P. O'BRIEN



As general manager of the Oregon-Washington Railroad & Navigation Co., J. P. O'Brien has an enviable reputation. The road forms a part of the great Union Pacific system, and there is no better managed railroad in the nation, which speaks volumes for the manager of the O-W. R. & N. He was for many years a former citizen of La Grande, starting his career here in the operating department. His many old time associates here have watched him rise to the prominent position he now holds with an extremely friendly interest.

Judge Finn Corrects Some Important History

GENERALLY ACCEPTED LEGEND OF HOW UNION LOST THE RAILROAD IS UPSET BY VETERAN LAWYER.

How a story can get started and remain as a fact in the minds of a whole community when it really has no legs to stand on, is best shown by the oft-repeated legend relative to the town of Union losing the main line of the Union Pacific because that town would not "kick through" with demands made by "evil" engineers who located the road. Everyone who has stayed in the Grande-Honda valley overnight has heard this tale and believed it.

Now comes a man who knows whereof he speaks and denies the story as a whole and in detail. That man is Judge C. H. Finn, who is located in La Grande in 1922. He was attorney for B. M. Steele who had the contract for construction of the road from Pendleton east. Baker had been selected as the terminus of the Oregon Railroad and Navigation company, which was then the name of the railroad, and was to meet the Oregon Short Line at Baker. Mr. Steele made such rapid progress with construction work that he extended the line to Huntington before the short line contractors could get beyond that point, hence Huntington was placed in an important position in the railroad world instead of Baker.

How Railroad Missed Union

Judge Finn corrects for all time the distorted history with reference to the railroad missing Union. He says before the line was located through La Grande, citizens of Idaho City, then the most influential in the county, among them Chas. Goodenough and J. M. Church, made a strenuous effort to have the line run direct from Oro Hill to that point, then across the valley to Henshaw, or Pay's Point, and climb the hill east of Union. They all but succeeded in this undertaking, being thwarted finally by the efforts of Daniel Chapin and other citizens of La Grande. Chapin gave to the company outright, 50 acres of land, 40 acres of which constitute part of the La Grande present townsite.

Surveying of the road to and beyond Union had been in charge of three engineers, and it is often charged that they became offended at some of the citizens of Union and located the road up Pyle's canyon as a matter of spite. Judge Finn states there is no foundation whatever for this story. Before the line was located the chief engineer came out from New York and in company with Mr. Steele and Judge Finn, went over the various routes and definitely selected Pyle canyon because the located the road up Pyle canyon as by selected and located on the ground. Pyle canyon because the long 1000 there afforded an easier grade than any other route.

Authority on Early History

That Judge Finn is positive authority on early La Grande history no one can doubt. He was town attorney in the Old Town in 1882 and 1884 and when the old and new La Grande were incorporated as one city, he framed the city charter and was elected the first mayor. He served the people as their mayor in 1886 and again in 1891.

He was born in New York seventy-five years ago, went to California by water crossing the Isthmus of Panama in the spring of 1867. After teaching two years in the Petaluma, Calif. schools he moved to Iowa and was licensed to practice law in 1874. The lure of the west hung to him and he came to La Grande six years later, being admitted to practice law in Oregon in 1882 upon a certificate from the supreme court of Kansas. He has been a practicing attorney

of prominence in this state for 41 years.

There was but a fringe of frame houses in La Grande when as a young man full of energy he cast his lot in this valley. One lone house stood where La Grande proper now stands. The railroad was then not completed this side of the Blue Mountains. Construction work reached La Grande in 1884 and in November of that year the first regular train arrived here. It was in 1884 when construction work was in progress this side of the mountains that local citizens induced Senator Dolph to come to La Grande and make a speech, the election being held in June of that year. Judge Finn recalls that Senator Dolph came to La Grande on a construction train. Senator J. H. Slater rode to Huntington on the first regular train. Ever pulled over this railroad and delivered an address there in honor of the completion of the road. The senator then proceeded to Washington to take up his duties in the United States senate.

To Judge Finn goes the additional honor of having framed, at the request of P. D. McCully and other citizens, the bill that created Walla Walla county. The bill was passed in the 1887 session of the legislature.

Regular Hours for Work Is the Dixon Motto

Procrastination may have been the besetting sin of attorneys in the days when Justice McBride was a young fellow, but, according to H. E. Dixon, one of the successful lawyers of La Grande, "then days have gone forever" due to the high pressure of living and the demands on one's time.

"I find that the machinery of law must start in an attorney's office at a certain hour, just the same as the machinery of the Bowman-Hicks saw mill starts on time. For that reason I have accustomed myself to put in regular hours in my office and at my work, letting nothing upset my plans."

The result of Mr. Dixon's habit is reflected in the fine business which he now possesses and his success in the field of law is well known. His loyalty to the good roads movement is far in excess of the average citizen and in a most analytical manner he can convince anyone who will listen, of not only the merit of the highways, but of the economic feature.

Mr. Dixon graduated from the law department of the University of Nebraska in 1911 and was admitted to practice before the supreme court of that state. He was admitted to practice in Oregon in 1911 and first opened an office in Elgin, where he remained a short time and then removed to La Grande in October, 1911. He was married December 24, 1915 and Mr. and Mrs. Dixon have two fine children, Margaret Elizabeth and Howard Knight.

In civil affairs Mr. Dixon has ever been a good worker. He is affiliated with the Methodist church and the lodges in which he is a member are Masonic, Elks, Modern Woodmen and Knights of Pythias. He was appointed referee in bankruptcy in 1920 and has handled many cases. They are talking of getting out three-cent pieces like we used to have, says Cy Kalk. Added to a nickel, one of them will buy five cents worth of anything.

Electric Development In Eastern Oregon

HEAVY INVESTMENT OF CAPITAL HAS BROUGHT ABOUT GOOD SERVICE; MORE DEVELOPMENT IS TO COME

(By J. P. Lottridge)

When the Observer editor asked me to write an article on the above subject he flattered me barefacedly, first by inferring that I could write an article at all, and then by the scope of the subject he suggested.

Eastern Oregon is commonly understood to be comprised of the 15 counties lying east of the Cascades. An empire of 65,000 square miles. To discuss the electric light and power facilities of that vast territory is far beyond my knowledge and ability, so I will merely make the general statement that in this territory there are some 14 operating power companies representing an investment of over \$10,000,000 and pass on to that part of Eastern Oregon with which I am more familiar—Union, Wallowa, Baker and Grant counties. Someone has said that a community cannot progress faster than its public utilities—electric, gas, telephone, telegraph, and express. These companies will let it be by the service they render. We who are in the utility game are apt to look at the matter in the opposite light, that the utilities cannot progress faster than a community wants them to or will let them. The truth lies in both statements. As Frank W. Smith, president of the National Electric Light association, said a short time ago, "If a community is to be modern, progressive, prosperous, possessing a good civic pride, it must have good utilities, and almost inevitably it will have, because it will deserve them and get them." The other side of the matter is that if utilities are to be modern, progressive, prosperous and render first class service, it is because the communities they serve are so intertwined that what helps or hurts one, helps or hurts the other.

If these things are true of utilities in general, they are surely most especially true of those utilities furnishing electric light, heat and power. So complex has our civilization become, that an almost inconceivable public catastrophe would result if by some failure of natural forces, all supply of electric power should cease. The complete and continued failure of the supply of electricity to a community the size of La Grande, or even smaller, might entail loss of life and property and would undoubtedly involve hardship and suffering. Individuals here and there can, and do, get along without electricity in their homes, but as a whole our business and social structures have been built up and are maintained to a greater extent than is commonly understood or appreciated by this swift, powerful, silent Universal Servant. The production, manufacture and distribution of not only our comforts and luxuries, but our food, fuel, clothing and shelter, could not be maintained upon the scale which we now require without electricity.

Better Understanding Realized

Because of being so vital to our existence and progress is why we call an electric light and power company a public utility. Because of that and, I am sorry to say, because of abuses bygone days, we have called into existence public service commissions, whose functions are to safeguard the interests that are involved and to see that efficient and continued service is rendered. Happily, for the most part a better understanding has grown up in late years between the power companies and those whom they serve. The officials and employees of the companies have come to a broader understanding of the great public service which they are conducting. The users of electricity have come to have an understanding of some of the problems of the companies and the desirability of allowing them fair rates when good service is rendered. The old bitterness and distrust—the old bitter-crying of each other to be ready to take the slightest advantage—is passing away. Fair treatment, practical application of the golden rule, is replacing it and the result is better service, better returns, happier and more prosperous communities and employees. Regulatory commissions have come to say and that is proper, but more and more their offices are becoming quasi-judicial—more and more they are exerting their efforts to clear up misunderstandings and to study and interpret the highly technical nature of the business for the benefit of those who do not have the time nor the inclination to investigate for themselves. Engineering problems, questions of finance, broad consideration of the ultimate

good of all concerned. These are the outstanding things in evaluation at present. And how much better it is to be so than to have to elect men to prevent profiteering and exploitation on one hand and spite and retaliation on the other. How much more befitting to our American standards.

Great investments, in proportion to the revenues received, are necessary to furnish electric service. The best financed and most carefully managed electric utilities seldom have annual gross revenues in excess of one-fifth of their investment which means that they turn over their capital about once in five years. Compare this with the average successful merchant who turns over his investment several times in one year. From the gross revenues, all expenses must be taken. It costs electric utilities from 65 per cent to 80 per cent to do business. That is, out of every dollar that is taken in 55 to 35 cents must be paid out for expenses of all kinds, leaving 20 to 35 cents with which to try to earn a return on the capital invested. The cost of doing business for the average successful merchant is from 15 to 20 per cent. Summed up, this means that as an average, an electric light and power company, or central station as it is commonly called, will take in about \$20 per year for each \$100 invested. Out of this \$20 it will pay out around 70 per cent or \$14 for expenses, leaving \$6.00 for profits, or 6 per cent on the \$100. And the great problem is to secure the added capital which is necessary each year in order to keep pace with the growth of the communities served.

What has all this to do with electric light and power facilities of Eastern Oregon? Simply this. I have attempted to outline a few of the underlying principles of the relations between the central station industry as a whole and the people it is serving. They apply to Eastern Oregon very particularly. Here we have representative communities—modern and prosperous cities and towns, progressive and forward-looking men and women, wonderful possibilities for development of natural resources—what of our power companies? What have they done to help build up their territories? What are they going to do in the future? Will they be in the van, an aid to progress? A source of pride?

Desire to Build Prevails

I cannot answer specifically for other than the company which I represent. But I can say this: I know most of the financial and operating heads of these other companies operating in Eastern Oregon. I have observed the policies they have pursued during the past fifteen years. I have known some of the problems. I have sat with them in conferences and hearings. And I know that they are high-principled men. I know that they are builders with high ideals. They are heart and soul in earnest in their desire to meet the needs of their territories with the best service possible and at rates that are fair and make electric service feasible for every legitimate development. They are keen, far-seeing business men. And with such men at the helm of the Ida Power company in the eastern portion of Baker and Malheur counties; the Electric Light and Power company in Harney county; the Prairie Power company and the Consolidated Electric company in Grant county; the Enterprise Electric company in Wallowa county; the Pacific Power and Light company in Umatilla and other counties farther west; The Hecla Light and Power company in Morrow county; the Sherman Electric company in Sherman county; the Vale Electric company in Crook county; the Deschutes Power company and the Bend Water, Light and Power company in Deschutes county with such men, who, whether their companies are large or small, are among the leaders of their communities, my judgment is that Eastern Oregon is going to have the electrical service that will always be ready to serve the needs of its progress.

Utilities Heavy Taxpayers

Serving practically all of Union county, most of Baker county and part of Grant county, is the province of the Eastern Oregon Light and Power company. It is a consolidation of the Baker Gas and Electric company, the Rock Creek Power and Transmission company, the Elk-

horn Light and Power company, the Fremont Power company, the Grande Ronde Electric company and the Elgin Electric company. At present it has four water power and one steam plants with a total capacity of slightly over four thousand horse power. It has under way a new steam plant of nearly 1500 horsepower, making a total of about 5500 horsepower. The output of all plants in 1922 was nearly 12,000,000 kilowatt-hours. It has approximately 170 miles of high voltage transmission lines and many hundreds of miles of distribution lines. It keeps employed an average of about 100 persons. It serves about 6,000 customers, which means that its service is used by nearly 20,000 people. It expends annually over \$200,000 in the operation and maintenance of its properties. Its taxes alone amount to about \$25,000 a year.

More Development Ahead

Like most electric utilities, the Eastern Oregon Light and Power company has had to struggle through grave financial perils. The very nature of the business made that inevitable. Large investments and heavy expenses had to be carried while business was developing. A power company cannot add to its capacity in small quantities as a grocer or a hardware merchant adds to his stock when the demand justifies it. Power can only be developed

in large units. Once it is developed it is there for all time to come. The investment and expenses must be carried until the growth of the business put it on a paying basis. About the time this occurs more development must be provided. For these reasons the early history of nearly every power company is full of financial vicissitudes. The Eastern Oregon Light and Power company has been no exception. But it has served its territory and with the exception of last winter, when a combination of circumstances beyond its control caused an acute shortage of power, it has met every legitimate demand for electric energy that has been made upon it. It has weathered the worst of the pioneering period.

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After June 25th my ranch will be located just east of the city limits of La Grande on the Old Oregon Trail. Located at present at 1301 W. Ave., north La Grande.

H. W. Smith. Sole Owner

Member National Silver Fox Breeders' Association of Muskegon, Michigan.

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Our aim in our business concern is SERVICE to our customers. As we feel and believe that SERVICE has its just reward in increased business. It does not matter what you may need—a stamp, a telephone call, a delivery, or any other SERVICE. We aim to serve you, AND DO IT WITH A SMILE.

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FIRE BRICK — FACE BRICK
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