

LOCAL NEWSPAPER HISTORY DATES BACK TO THE MIDDLE 60'S

La Grande's history, generally speaking, dates back to 1861, when Ben Brown built the first house here and tilled the first land.

La Grande's newspaper history, however, did not begin until 1868, seven years later, on the 18th of April, when the first issues of the Blue Mountain Times and the Mountain Sentinel—papers of different political faith—sprang into being simultaneously. From a no paper town, La Grande suddenly became a two-paper town!

Mentioned in History

The Observer has no copies of these first papers, but the "History of Union and Wallawa Counties," tells much of their origin. The political complexion of the old Times for forcibly expressed in its motto, "The Union, Right or Wrong," the history says, and the Mountain Sentinel, democratic in politics, did not begin to sympathize with the southern people in the sad plight in which the war left them.

The history records that no copy of No. 1, Vol. 1 of the Sentinel could be found but a torn copy of the first Times was found. From that paper of April 18, 1868, there could be little gleaned, but the second issue informs one that Meacham Brothers are still engaged in business on the Blue mountains and keeping the hotel known as Lee's Exchange, also offering their highway known as the Unatilla and Powder River road—on terms before advertised, to travelers and freighters; that James C. Dow, attorney at law, La Grande, pays particular attention to land office business; that M. B. Mallory wishes a meeting of the Salamander fire company; that J. C. McWhirter has just removed his harness shop to the former City Bakery building; that the Banner Flour depot will exchange flour for grain of all kinds, allowing 75 cents a bushel for No. 1 wheat and baking \$6 per barrel for XXX flour unsacked of \$6.50 sacked; that James McDonald keeps a blacksmith shop on the south side of C street near the livery stable of J. C. McComas; that Rev. J. G. Deardorff will preach at the M. E. church the first Sunday in each month; Rev. J. F. Roberts, of the Protestant Episcopal church, on the third Sunday, and Rev. O. Osborne, of the United Brethren church on the fourth.

Reviews Valley

"In the second number of the Sentinel, dated Apr. 25, is a general review of the topography and of the general conditions obtaining in the Grande Ronde valley," the history continues. "We are told that country roads cross the valley in all directions, but the main highways are toll roads. One, called the Meacham road, comes over the Blue mountains and follows the Grande Ronde river, for some distance, until it emerges into the valley at Oro Dell. Thence it goes to La Grande and directly east across the valley to Union and out at the south end via Pyle's canyon or the old Emigrant road of Ladd's hill. Another called the Thomas & Ruckle road extends over the Blue mountains from the headquarters of the Unatilla river, entering the valley on the west side near the north end and leading thence through the town of Summerville and across the valley to the opposite side; thence up the east side past the mouth of Forest Cove, through Union, and into the Powder river valley by the same outlets as the Meacham road."

"The paper speaks of the wonderful changes wrought in the appearance of the valley since its first settlement. 'The waste prairie,' it states, 'has changed to fenced and cultivated farms, and in all directions the handwork of intelligence and industry is visible. Comfortable houses and outbuildings have been built, and orchards planted, while from the poor immigrant has sprung the well to do farmer. We are also informed that La Grande the county seat, has 600 inhabitants, its complement of stores and shops, two printing presses, etc.; that Union, a considerable town, 15 miles from La Grande, on Catherine Creek, transacts not a little business as a natural result of the fact that nearly all the roads through the valley center there. 'Summerville,' says the paper, 'is a small town in the north end of the valley. It boasts a store, postoffice, hotel and blacksmith shop. Oro Dell is situated on both sides of the Grande Ronde river at the mouth of its canyon, and also boasts its hotel, postoffice and shops.'

Tells Of Five Mills

"We have reserved the mills of our valley for special mention. There are five flouring and three sawmills. The flouring mill at La Grande is the only one run by steam. It is owned by J. H. Wilkinson. The flouring and sawmill at Oro Dell is a combined affair, and is run by the Grande Ronde river. A beautiful and romantic spot is the Oro Dell mill site. A flouring mill at Union on Catherine creek is under the supervision of Mr. Wright, and another flouring mill, owned by S. G. French & Co., is on a tributary of Catherine creek. In Forest Cove, about two miles from the valley proper, is a sawmill, the power for which is furnished by a little mountain stream. At Summerville is a flouring mill, owned by Rinehart Brothers, run by a tributary of the Grande Ronde and up in the foothills, on a very romantic little mountain stream, is the sawmill of Boyce & Trimble. These mills all make the best of flour or lumber, or both, and have worked a wonderful change in our home affairs. . . . Two large shrubs and fruit tree nurseries are well matured, one owned by Gagliotti at Oro Dell, and one by Geer, in Forest Cove."

"From the issue of the Sentinel of September 26, 1866, we quote a portion of the wholesale price lists of commodities as follows: flour, self rising, per barrel, \$9 and \$10, super plain, per barrel, \$5 and

Then the Chronicle, one of the few of the early papers that still existed in the present century, was organized by Mr. McComas and John Devine. Mr. Eckley quit his position with the Gazette and purchased Mr. McComas' interest in the Chronicle, while W. A. Parker took Devine's interest. A year later Parker dropped out of the game and went east, leaving Mr. Eckley in charge.

After Mr. Eckley went to the Chronicle, W. F. Snodgrass—son of W. J. Snodgrass, was identified with the sheet and it was later published by Charles T. McDaniel, Wallawa banker, who had it a year or two before Mr. Stevenson took possession of the editorial pen.

First Rotary Press

It was during 1891 when the first rotary press was put into use in La Grande—a Cottrell press—and it is said to be in use at present in the Elgin Recorder's office.

About this time the Gazette built a fine new home, which later became the Blue Mountain creamery, serving as a home for the industrial concern until last year when R. E. Tyler rebuilt the creamery.

The Gazette, in spite of its handsome home, had an up and down course, and finally "pettered out." But in 1874, the Sentinel changed its locality—moving to Union which had become the county seat of Union county. And for three years, La Grande people—still mourning over the loss of the court house—were also without the "power of the press." Those were the sorrowful days!

Again a Paper To Read

But it wasn't to last. In 1877 or '78, a group of men established a newspaper here, securing one Mr. Abbott, a printer, to start the paper. He brought a broken-down weekly from Vancouver and it became the La Grande Gazette (with the Rev. Mr. Hines, of the Blue Mountain university; others helping write the editorials, and W. J. Snodgrass and Daniel Chapman handling the finances).

In retrospect, Col. E. L. Eckley, dean of La Grande's benefactors, giving a large amount of land to the railroad when it came through. The Gazette continued on this basis until Sheldon F. Wilson took it over and operated it for a year.

About that time Mr. Eckley, who had just completed a preparatory course in the Blue Mountain university, became associated with a Mr. Biedleman, a brother of Dan Biedleman, who lived at Union a few years ago, and the two men took over the Gazette—which had been out of publication for a month—and changed its name to the Union County Record. Mr. Eckley soon gave \$100 for Mr. Biedleman's interest and for three and a half years was publisher of the paper.

In 1884 Mr. Eckley stepped out of ownership and the paper was renamed by Alonzo Cleaver, who changed the paper's name back to The Gazette. In the meantime, Mr. Eckley and C. H. Finn published the Argus for a year, but ceased publication when a fire destroyed the plant. Then Mr. Eckley accepted a position on the Gazette's staff and worked there for about three years.

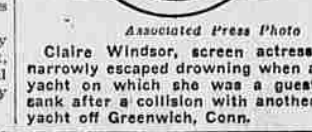
Sentinel Returns To La Grande

In the meantime, the Sentinel was going ahead at Union, with J. O. Kuhn and George E. Owen finally purchasing it from S. H. McComas, and returning it to La Grande. They dropped out of the game, selling to Patterson and Scott. In the meantime, these men printed the first daily in La Grande's history about 1885, nicknamed the "Little Acorn," which flourished for a few months and then died. Their slogan was, "Large Trees From Little Acorns Grow."

The paper was then taken up by Glenn, from Weiser, a democrat. (The Gazette was a republican, and it was changed to the Weekly Grande Ronde Post.

Associated Press Photo

Claire Windsor, screen actress, narrowly escaped drowning when a yacht on which she was a guest sank after a collision with another yacht off Greenwich, Conn.



About 1910 Bruce Dennis entered the picture, buying the Observer. Later he sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Clark Letter and J. D. Meyers, still later buying it back. In 1914 Mr. Dennis bought out the Eckley paper, and for awhile La Grande had the one daily paper. Mr. Eckley had changed the name of his Chronicle to the Star, and it was from this that the Observer-Star derived its name. The Star, started in 1907, was a morning paper. Mr. Eckley, whose name figured so prominently in La Grande newspaper history for so many decades, worked for Mr. Dennis for awhile and then retired. Today he is still active in many lines, only recently returning from attendance at the Oregon State grange convention.

Tells Of The Scoop

In connection with the early days in La Grande, Mr. Eckley recently spoke before the Lions club, and the writer of this article re-prints Mr. Eckley's story of THE SCOOP of the century, as far as La Grande was concerned.

It seems that in those days, when the paper went to press once a week and when the valley was not so thickly populated as today, Mr. Eckley's main worry was to be able to get something in print before all of the population knew as much about it as he did. Word of mouth was even a greater competitor of the newspaper then than today, it seems.

He struggled along, sometimes getting some hot stuff and more often knowing that everything in the paper had been milled over beforehand through the community. But there came a day, and Mr. Eckley's paper—so he claimed—was the first to announce the nomination of a presidential candidate.

Big News!

One evening Mr. Eckley had put his paper to bed, and went out to meet a stage driver, coming from Hilgard. He pumped and pumped the stage driver—who was tired and more or less silent as a result of the day's work—and finally, about the time the stage driver was through for the day, found out that the telegraph operator at Hilgard, (the wires had just reached Hilgard en route west), had picked up the word that day that a presidential candidate had been nominated!

Mr. Eckley's spirits soared, and how! He managed to get a promise out of the driver to keep mum, and then hot-footed it for the office, already writing leads and heads in his mind as he made haste to the scene of his labors. (In those days wire service consisted more or less of what is now termed a "flash" with the local editor supplying the background and the rest of the story from a mind well posted in events of the day, gained by careful perusal of all the papers available).

Into a lead position went the story, and elsewhere in the paper Mr. Eckley modestly informed the readers of his papers that it, in keeping with its usual policy of furnishing the best of service, etc., etc., was scooping the world.

Well, for once, Mr. Eckley beat Old Man Gossip, and it wasn't until the papers were delivered, that the news of the presidential nomination became known.

One Sour Note

That was a grand and glorious feeling for Mr. Eckley, he related, but there was one sour note.

Some of the Oregonian-minded readers of the day waited two full days until the Portland paper arrived to verify Mr. Eckley's story. It was the truth!

MODERN 'PHONE SYSTEM IN USE

Intercommunicating Hook Up Installed in New Observer Building.

A feature of the new Observer building and its equipment is the intercommunicating telephone system which has been installed by the West Coast Telephone company, not only for the convenience and efficiency of the working staff of The Observer but also to speed up calls incoming and outgoing from the building to the city system.

The system, linked with the city telephone exchange by a number of trunks, consists of 10 separate telephones, all hooked into the same system of wires and so arranged that persons in one department of the building may converse either with persons in another department or with others in La Grande.

The system, in general, is similar to other intercommunicating systems now in use in the larger business places in northwestern cities.

Calls coming into the building will be handled by a girl at the main telephone desk, and she will ring whoever is desired—using a special button on her keyboard which automatically rings the department requested. Talk from one department to another within the building does not go through her, but is directly from one phone to the other. Through use of this system it is possible for two persons to be talking with others outside of the building, while six others inside the building may be carrying on separate conversations, which will in no way interfere or interfere with any of the conversations.

At each desk where a telephone is located, there is a small box switchboard, equipped with 12 buttons. Two of these operate the trunk lines, and the other 10 are for the various stations in the building and for ringing. All that is necessary for inter-departmental talk is for one to take down his receiver, press his party's button and ring. If wanting to talk to someone away from the building, he presses either trunk number 1 or trunk number 2, and the city exchange operator answers.

The Observer was given a new telephone number a few days ago as preliminary to moving into the new plant, which is Main 600.

Telephones are carefully placed through the building so that each office, and in some cases, each person in some department, has his or her own phone.

Phones are in the editor's office, the business manager's office, and one is located in the composing room. There are three in the news room, one for the city editor's desk and one for each reporter's desk. The valley news office also has a telephone and there are three placed in the business office lobby.

PARIS PROMOTING COSSACK TURBANS

PARIS (AP)—There are indications that the Cossack influence is to be felt in autumn coats and hats. One of the leading dressmakers has scored a big success with a black astrakhan fur added in the Cossack manner.

With the coat is shown a Russian round cap with fur on it.

LONGER, SOFTER SCARVES FOR AUTUMN WEAR

PARIS (AP)—The incoming scarf is long and narrow as compared with an outgoing general style of squares and triangles. Soft materials of dark coloring also are characteristic of neckwear.

being shown for advance autumn wear.

PARALYZED STUDENT HAS PERFECT GRADES

GENEVA, N. Y. (AP)—Paralyzed from the waist down since the age of seven, Ray L. Balcom of Blinghamton, N. Y., was graduated from Hobart College this year with the highest scholastic record attained at Hobart since the college was founded 105 years ago.

Not only was his college career marked by an unbroken succession of "A" marks in all courses, but he completed the regular course in three years instead of four. Rated as a junior in his second year, he was admitted to Phi Beta Kappa, honorary scholastic fraternity.

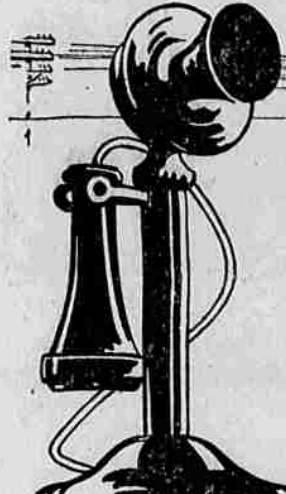
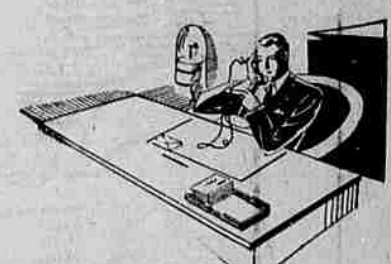
By private tutoring he practically paid his way through college. He traveled in a hand-propelled wheel chair, and his physical handicap did not keep him from extracurricular activities.

Halcolm plans to be an instructor in modern languages.

Low Fonseca, Cleveland first baseman, who last year lead the American league in batting, was sent to California to recuperate after he sustained a broken leg this season.

Congratulations

To The Evening Observer On Its Beautiful New Home—a Credit to This City. Our Best Wishes for The Observer's Continued Growth and Success



The Heart of a Daily Newspaper Depends on

Speedy Communication

A newspaper must save time, save steps, save energy. Time is the essence of newspaper success—as it is of any business—and it is only natural that one of the first requirements of the new

Observer Plant

Would be a complete

Intercommunicating Telephone System

Allowing communication between all offices and departments and the outside simultaneously. Quick—Sure—Economical



West Coast Telephone Co.

Protect Productive Equipment

It costs money to have expensive machinery out of commission because of a fire.

The plant of the Evening Observer is always adequately covered by Reynolds insurance.

Dependable, economical service—no worry over fire losses.

REYNOLDS Insurance Agency

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