



Fifty Years Ago

The Oregonian Completes Its First Half Century Today

BY H. W. SCOTT.

FIFTY YEARS AGO today the first number of The Oregonian appeared. The population of Oregon by the census of that year was 12,294. The territory that existed then under the designation of Oregon included the whole region west of the Rocky Mountains between the 42d and 49th parallels of latitude. Within this region at the present time lie the States of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, part of Wyoming and a large portion of Montana. Portland, when the first number of The Oregonian was issued, had probably 600 inhabitants. The Oregonian has been a witness and the main chronicler of all the growth of this great region, containing now 1,250,000 inhabitants, and Portland remains the most considerable city in it.

The modern state finds a history, or transcript, of its life in the growth of the newspaper. In the olden time there was no newspaper to record the birth and growth of states. The state grew, and the newspaper came later. But in the modern time the newspaper appears at the beginning, and its work and its growth are coincident with the progress of the state.

So The Oregonian appeared at the very beginning of development in the Pacific Northwest. American pioneers had, indeed, been in the country 10 or 15 years, but their number was too few to constitute an active social organization and living community. But as Portland began to grow into a village, the ambitious men of the place were resolved that there should be a newspaper to record her growth, to advocate her interests, to carry her message to the world. She must have a newspaper, moreover, to set forth the attractions of the country, to represent its possibilities, to prove to all who would read that here was a seat of coming empire. The time had come for Portland to reach out for trade, to assert her position in respect to external and internal commerce; and in the early part of the year 1850 William W. Chapman and Stephen Coffin, two citizens who took a leading part in all undertakings to establish Portland, determined to visit San Francisco on various business of this character, and one considerable part of their purpose was to make arrangements for establishing a newspaper here.

On this errand they were in San Francisco July 4, 1850. There, and about that date, Mr. Coffin happened to meet Thomas J. Dryer, a native of Ulster County, New York, who had recently arrived in California. Mr. Dryer had worked on the country press in his state, and was a vigorous, rather than a polished, writer. His hand brought with him to California a hand printing press and a small lot of printing material, and was looking for a place where he might start a newspaper. Mr. Coffin introduced him to Mr. Chapman, and the two explained to him that they wanted a newspaper at Portland.

Mr. Dryer at once consented to come to Portland. "Now we shall have a paper at Portland," said Mr. Chapman, "and we will call it 'The Oregonian.'" As soon as practicable Mr. Dryer's press and material were shipped, but did not arrive at Portland till November. Messrs. Chapman and Coffin took great interest in the forthcoming journal; they assisted Mr. Dryer in furnishing a publication office; they set up all the right preceding the issue of the first number, and there was a series of solemnly amusing ceremonies as the first paper came off the press. It was a sheet of four pages, six columns to the page, and was to be published weekly. On the morning of December 4, 1850, the first number was delivered through the town by Arthur and Thomas, sons of Mr. Chapman, and by Henry Hill, stepson of Mr. Coffin. The subscription price of this little paper was \$1 a year. Mr. Chapman hired a man to go on horseback and deliver the first number as far as Corvallis (then Marysville), on the West Side, with instructions to cross there and deliver it on the East Side upon his return. Thus The Oregonian was given to the world. The office was at the northwest corner of Front and Morrison streets. In a "shack" that was pulled down a year or two later.

Plunging into the discussions that attended the efforts to settle a new country and to lay the foundations of its growth, and adding no little to the controversies and contentions that grew out of such a situation, The Oregonian at once became well known. An incisive vigor characterized its work. Mr. Dryer was an aggressive and spirited writer, well suited to the requirements of pioneer journalism. There was little of what would now be known as news; Oregon was remote and isolated; intercourse with the outside world was infrequent, and the journals of that day gave little attention to reporting the ordinary incidents and affairs of their own localities. Petty political contention formed the staple of newspaper work. A few months after The Oregonian was started at Portland, the Statesman was started at Oregon City, then the capital of the territory, and as one was Whig and the other Democrat, each was a spur to the partisanship of the other. In those days there was no rivalry in the obtaining and publication of news. The rivalry of newspapers was shown in the championship of the claims of their respective localities and in the rough discussions of local and provincial politics. During the first 10 years of the existence of The Oregonian, the territory, and then the state, were controlled by the Democratic party, and opposition was virtually hopeless. But The Oregonian never relaxed its efforts against the overwhelming odds in politics, and it was the steady champion of the interests of Portland against all rivals. At first it received its news from abroad at irregular intervals, as vessels would come in from San Francisco; but after a time there was a monthly steamer, and later two steamers a month; while San Francisco herself received the news of the world from New York, by the isthmus of Panama, often after it was a month old. Many times The Oregonian exhausted its slender stock of white paper, and for weeks together would be compelled to appear on colored sheets, but it never missed an issue or begged the indulgence of its readers for imperfections or omissions. It was al-

never paid its way, and when its resources were finally exhausted and it was forced to succumb, its various proprietors had sunk fully \$150,000. Yet, while this competitor was in the field, The Oregonian had still another to meet. In 1870 Ben Holladay started the Oregon Bulletin. This paper he backed lavishly, but it was always a losing business, and after a career of a little over five years it, too, gave up the ghost. In that time it had sunk nearly or quite \$200,000. A third formidable effort was made in 1880, when the daily Northwest News appeared. This paper was as unsuccessful as its predecessors. The original proprietor, after losing a great amount of money, abandoned it, and it passed from the hands of one

does not owe its position and success to absence of competition or to the fortune of opportunity, but to vigilance, management and hard work. Of the editorial management of The Oregonian, after Mr. Dryer's time, it now remains to speak. During some months there was no regular editor. Mr. Pittock got work done as he could, and superintended it himself. In 1863 Simeon Francis, who had long published the Springfield (Ill.) Journal, came to Oregon and took the editorship of The Oregonian. His experience as an editor and his general knowledge of newspaper work were very serviceable. He was an old friend of President Lincoln, who presently made him a Paymaster in the Army, and in 1861

amid great difficulties, and was glad of an opportunity to show his willingness to work. In his hands continuous and laborious editorial work upon The Oregonian, by one who had no thought beyond doing his best and his utmost for the paper, began.

With the exception of the interval between October, 1872 and April, 1877, The Oregonian has ever since been under the editorial direction of Mr. Scott. During that interval the editor was Mr. Hill, an able lawyer, well known throughout the Northwest, now a resident of Oakland, Cal. Mr. Hill came into the paper in consequence of a partial change in the proprietorship. Mr. Pittock had sold to Hon. H. W. Corbett and others, including

A Personal Narrative

How the Old Weekly Oregonian Was Conducted - Starting the Daily

BY H. L. PITTOCK.

BECAUSE of my long and continuous connection with The Oregonian, I am told that a personal narrative is, for this particular occasion, not only justified, but demanded. I am induced, therefore, to relate a part of my own experiences in the early days of The Oregonian, and to tell some things that may be of interest in its history at times when its vicissitudes were many and its future not certain. I shall have little to say about the later career of The Oregonian, for it is all sufficiently within the knowledge of the present generation of readers; and I shall confine myself largely to the period when its first proprietor controlled its destiny, and also to the time when my own efforts were exerted to establish a daily newspaper strong enough to survive the fierce competition to which it was long subjected. The responsibility of "getting out the paper" was placed upon my shoulders at an early date; and it was not divided with another for some years. My association with Mr. Scott dates from 1864, and it has continued, with one interruption, made necessary by business exigencies, until the present time. It will continue, no doubt, until its natural end.

I came to Oregon in 1853, with my brother, Robert Pittock. I was first attracted to the distant Northwest by letters written to the papers of Pittsburg, where I lived, from members of the United Presbyterian church. That denomination, then as now, was quite strong in Pennsylvania, and it had a flourishing missionary colony out here in Oregon. I read also in the Pittsburg Dispatch much interesting correspondence from Mr. Edward Jay Allen, who had come out here in 1833 and rafted down the Snake River. I was then a mere boy, but I determined to go out and seek my fortune. My brother was of the same mind. We joined two families named Stewart and Love, and in April, 1853, started down the Ohio River to St. Louis, and then up the Missouri to St. Joseph, which was the usual point of rendezvous for the long journey across the plains. We met with some adventures, the most serious of which was an unsuccessful effort on the part of Indians to cut off a part of our train at Boise River. The Stewarts and Loves left us at the Malheur River and went up that stream across the Cascades to Eugene City. My brother Robert went with them. I came on down to the Columbia with the family of John Stephenson, of Parkersburg, Va., who afterward located a claim near what is now Fulton, in this county. At the John Day River we cut off from the main road and came through Tygh Valley and over the Barlow road into Oregon City.

My father was a printer, and I had learned a little more than the rudiments of the trade with him. When I was 12 years old I began to set type. My first effort, therefore, when I reached Oregon City, was to obtain employment in the office of the Oregon Spectator, then under the control of D. J. Schnebly. I failed, and I went on with the Stephensons, aided them in their preliminary work of establishing a domicile among the trees on their claim, and after a month came on to Portland, arriving here on November, 1853. I diligently hunted for work for some days. I remember that I was offered the place of assistant to the bartender at the Columbia Hotel, Front and Washington, but my talents and inclinations did not lie in that direction, and I declined. I sought out the office of the Times, then conducted by John Orvis Waterman and Russell D. Austin. The Times, by the way, was the successor of the Western Star, which had been started at Millwaukie, but had been soon "run off" by Waterman to the more promising City of Portland. They had no place for me. Finally Mr. Dryer offered me my board and clothing in exchange for my services for six months. I accepted. At the end of that period I engaged myself for a year for \$500, and then I got journeyman's wages. It is interesting to recall that the first piece I set up was an account of the negotiations for opening of the ports of Japan, then under way between Commodore Perry and the Japanese Government.

The quarters of the paper at that time (1853) were far from comfortable. The building was at the corner of First and Morrison streets, and had been cheaply and rudely built. It had no lining, no cold winter days that was very difficult to keep warm. That winter it was so cold that the Willamette River froze over, and the interior of the office was something like a refrigerator. The types on the stone froze so solidly together that we had to pour boiling hot water over them when we wanted to distribute (the process of returning the type to the cases). We never did get into a comfortable place until we moved into the second story of a brick building on Front street.

The Weekly Oregonian had a meager outfit. As nearly as I can remember, it consisted of one imposing stone, six stands, 40 or 50 (type) cases, a Washington hand press and a sink for wetting the paper. The editorial-rooms were in the adjoining residence of Mr. Dryer. In the composing-room of The Oregonian is still to be found that old stone, which is, I think, the only remaining part of the paper's original mechanical equipment. I made myself generally useful about the office, doing anything that came to hand; and there was much to do. The mechanical force consisted of two others besides myself. William Davis Carter, who had been associated with Waterman on the Times, was foreman, and E. T. Gunn was the printer. A man named D. S. Southmayd, who lived down on the Columbia Slough, usually came in and helped out for a day or two during the week. The hand press was a man-killer. It was a self-inker, and it took muscle, and a great deal of it, to run it. It had taken the place of the original Ramage press, which A. M. Berry, first foreman of The Oregonian, took with him to Olympia, where he started a paper called the Pioneer. I never knew what became of that old press. I should like to know. The Washington hand press which succeeded the Ramage was in its turn taken to Idaho, after The Oregonian was through with it, and was used for the first paper started in that territory.

Mr. Dryer composed the entire editorial



THE OREGONIAN BUILDING.

to another, till finally, after a career of six or seven years, it suspended. Its losses had also been very heavy—equal probably to those of either of the unfortunate ventures that preceded it. There have been other efforts of like kind, vigorous, yet unsuccessful, needless to recount here. These statements are presented as part of the history of The Oregonian, since they tend to show that it

he withdrew from The Oregonian. His successor was Amory Holbrook, an able man, but an irregular worker, who held the position about two years. After him, John F. Damon, now of Seattle, and Samuel A. Clarke, of Salem, were editors, successively. In May, 1866, Mr. Clarke resigned, and Harvey W. Scott succeeded him. Mr. Scott had come to Oregon in his early boyhood, had educated himself

Mr. Hill, a controlling interest in the paper, but Mr. Pittock retained the business management. In March, 1877, Mr. Scott bought the interest that had been sold to Mr. Corbett, and Mr. Pittock and Mr. Scott together bought the shares that had been sold to others, and Mr. Scott resumed editorial charge. Since then The Oregonian, as known today, has been created.



OREGONIAN BUILDING IN 1853, WITH RESIDENCE OF THE EDITOR.