

1700 Block of Main Street—East Side
by
Gary Dielman

One of the oldest and most intriguing photos of Baker City was taken shortly after 1865. It shows a small herd of cattle and several freight wagons in the heart of the budding town. Immediately behind the cattle stood a large two-story building with “Baker City House” written across the south end. That hotel, Baker City’s first, and the cattle were located at the south end of the oldest block in town, the site of today’s Chevron Station.



*Baker City House and Western Hotel (behind) in 1868
(South end of the 1700 block of Main Street)*

In this article I’ll tell with words and photos the early history of the block bounded by Auburn, Main (formerly Front Street), Valley, and Resort. But first I’ll list the present (2006) occupants. On the south end is the Chevron Station. Immediately to the north is the office of *The Record-Courier* newspaper. Joe Stubbs operates his Memory House Antiques in the middle of the block. Between those two buildings, both owned by Baker City IOOF Lodge #25 and Rebekah Lodge #8, is a common stairway leading to the second floor rooms of the lodges. On the north end of the block the McCord Brothers Building is presently being remodeled to be the new home of D’Ja Vu Collectibles of Rick and Judy Francis, who are moving their antiques from the adjacent building. Both buildings on the north end are owned by former Bakerite Cathy Stiltz Ramsey and husband Ed Ramsey of Crane, Oregon.

According to early Baker County historian Isaac Hiatt, Baker City House was built in 1865 by the McMurren brothers and was the third building constructed on

Front Street. (The first building built was, as you might guess, a saloon, and the second was a boarding house.) That same year Baker County's first postmaster, William F. McCrary, moved himself and his post office from Auburn to Baker City, where he constructed a building just north of Baker City House. The frame building served as a variety store and post office.

Joseph M. Lachner, great-grandfather of present Baker City resident Ann Kniesel, once owned Baker City House. Lachner, a native of Germany, operated a brewery on Spring Garden Street, when he first came to Baker City in 1872 from Clarksville, where he had a brewery. After acquiring the hotel, Lachner changed the name to Railroad House, which he operated until a catastrophic fire in 1886 wiped out the whole block of businesses, which included, starting at the north end, a saloon, a general store, a butcher shop, a jewelry store, a saloon, Lachner's Railroad House hotel, a sleeping room, a cobbler shop, and another saloon.



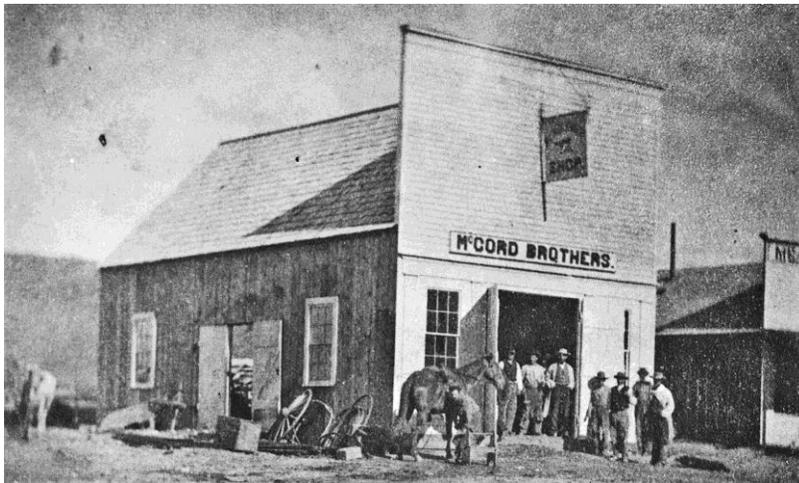
Baker City House and McCrary's Post Office and Variety Store

The block didn't stand empty long. By the end of 1887, there arose out of the ashes of the 1886 conflagration some of Baker City's most impressive business buildings, most of which are standing yet today. I'll first deal with the changes that took place on the part of the block presently occupied by the Chevron Station.

After the fire, Lachner built, on part of the old hotel site, a long, one-story brick structure divided into three businesses. He established in the northern-most two-thirds of the building a new Railroad House consisting of a saloon/brewery and a restaurant. A harness and saddle shop filled the other third. In 1896 Robert Palmer and Hugh Denham, who had operated a harness and saddle shop in La Grande, bought the Baker City shop for \$2,000. For the next thirty-seven years at that location, they made saddles, harnesses, buggy tops, and, after the turn of

the century, canvass automobile tops. Hugh Denham was a talented amateur photographer. Prints of many of his old photos may be seen in the Oregon Room of the Baker County Library and online at www.bakerlib.org, including photos of beautifully posed Palmer & Denham saddles.

The southern-most end of the block stood empty until about 1889, when a three-story residential mansion was built by a Chinese merchant on the northwest corner of Auburn and Resort. But for much of its early life the mansion served as a bordello run by Jenny Duffy, until shut down by city fathers in 1906. Around 1901 the *Baker City Herald* took over the former site of Lachner's restaurant. By 1903 Walter Baird was operating a grocery store in the last narrow bit of unoccupied real estate at the southwest end of the block. Around 1910 that southern-most lot was home to a 5-10-15¢ store that advertised "Nothing Over 15¢." By 1923 it was a battery sales and charging store.



*McCord Brothers blacksmith shop
(Southeast corner of 1700 block at Main and Valley streets)*

In January 1933 big changes came to the south end of the 1700 block. Palmer and Denham sold out and retired, the *Baker City Herald* moved its newspaper business to its present location on the northwest corner of First and Court streets, and a month later the one-story brick structures were leveled to be replaced by a Standard Station, predecessor of today's Chevron Station. The mansion, which was managed as Hotel Wilshire after prostitution was banned from the building in 1906, was also razed.

So what happened to the rest of the 1700 block after fire destroyed the original wood frame buildings in 1886? In December of that year, Joseph Lachner sold the balance of the land he owned, a thirty-two-foot lot, to Baker City Lodge #25 of IOOF for \$1,375. Just north of Lachner's Railroad House, the Odd Fellows constructed a building to house its IOOF lodge, with the lodge occupying the second floor and stores on the first floor.

In his 1949 memoir, Wesley Andrews, a former *Baker City Herald* reporter and later a famous photographer, recalled that IOOF Grand Noble C.L. Palmer, later Grand Master for Oregon, dedicated the building at the laying of the corner stone by brick mason E.T. Beers. Andrews wrote, "The event drew a large crowd, including the writer, then twelve years old. Under the cornerstone in an open space in its center were deposited copies of the *Morning Democrat*, the *Baker City Tribune*, the *Evening Reveille*, some lodge member's names and records, Chinese and American coins, dolls, pictures, etc." The cornerstone is still holding up the IOOF Building.



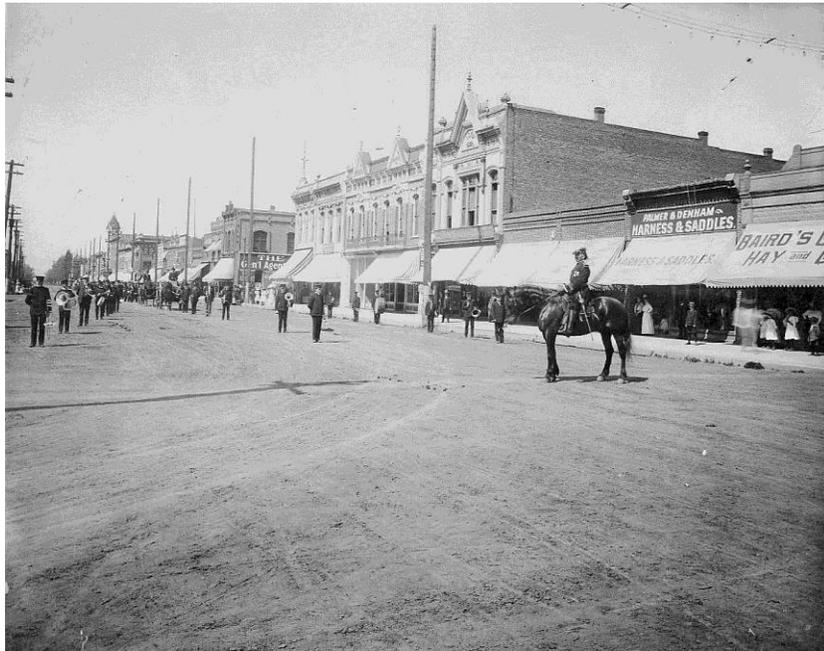
*1700 block on the east side of Main Street
(McCord Bros. Building at near end, former site of their blacksmith shop)*

On the lot next door north, County Commissioner James T. Wisdom put up a two-story building, which shared with the IOOF building a common stairway to the second floor. (In 1891 Wisdom also built a 75 x 80 foot barn known as the Wisdom barn still standing on Wingville Road a mile west of Highway 30.) Andrews remembered, "The first store in the new Wisdom Building was Adler's Crystal Palace with the large tower clock on the outer edge of the sidewalk in front." Owner Carl Adler was father of Baker City businessman and benefactor Leo Adler and Postmaster Sanford Adler.

In 1917 the Odd Fellows acquired the adjacent Wisdom Building from James and Lavina Wisdom for \$10,000, and expanded its IOOF lodge into the second floor area. Many oldtimers will remember that into the middle 1900s Our Market grocery store occupied the building's first floor. The two metal signs, both advertising in big letters "Our Market is Your Market," that adorned the front of the store are lying on the basement floor of Joe Stubb's Memory House. Joe

says he'll sell the pair for \$150. Joe says at one time the basement contained a bowling alley.

Two additional new two-story brick buildings rounded out the block's 1887 reconstruction. On the north end the ornate pediment proudly announced the 1887 construction date and "McCord Bro's." Wesley Andrews wrote that Bob McCord had a saloon on the first floor with the Alhambra Club upstairs. Later on the upper story was a brothel. In the middle 1900s it was home to The Mint saloon, the sign of which was just uncovered under plaster removed from the north outside wall during recent remodeling.



In 1934 the four one-story buildings on the south side of the 1700 block of Main were demolished to make room for a Standard service station.

Between the McCord and Wisdom buildings stood the Weller & Henry building. It differed from the other three buildings, all of which extend all the way to Resort Street, by being about two-thirds as long. George Henry had a butcher shop on the first floor, where Henry and a succession of butchers processed meat for over twenty-five years. Later, in the mid 1900s, Delbert Reams ran a saloon there called the Silver Dollar, thusly named for the silver dollars imbedded in the bar. That name, crumbling away, may still be seen imprinted in the concrete walkway leading from Resort Street to the backdoor.

A note about Joseph Lachner. He died in Baker City in 1905. His son and Ann Kniesel's great-uncle, Baker City attorney William Lachner, was a leader in Baker County for many years: deputy sheriff and tax collector; chairman of the Baker County Republican party; Baker City postmaster for eight years (his photo hangs



In 1934 the Standard service station was built at the south end of the 1700 block of Main Street replacing four one-story brick buildings.

in the post office); and candidate for Congress in 1906. At the January 22, 1904, hanging of Pleasant Armstrong, Deputy Sheriff Lachner read the death warrant to the convicted murderer and put the hood over his head just before he was hanged for the murder of his girlfriend, Minnie Ensminger. William Lachner was residing in Portland at the time of his death in 1926 at age fifty-seven.

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