

## *The Record-Courier* and Brinton Family Donate Photos and Documents

by  
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Baker County Library and Baker Heritage Museum recently received significant gifts of photos and documents to add to their collections of Baker County memorabilia. In July *The Record-Courier* and the Brinton family donated to the two local institutions approximately 6,000 photos and as many negatives and thirty-two boxes of written and printed materials representing decades of journalistic activity, mostly that of *The Record-Courier's* late publisher and editor Byron Brinton.

In July, *The Record-Courier* publisher Greg Brinton approached me with a proposition. Greg, successor publisher to his brother Ron D. Brinton, father Byron C. Brinton, and grandfather Charles M. Brinton, had just finished going through materials used in decades of production of the newspaper's weekly editions. Although the materials are no longer useful in the ongoing production of the newspaper, Greg realized their historic value in documenting the history of Baker County, a subject close to the heart of his father and brother.

Greg asked if I would find safe storage and be curator of the materials. As curator of the Baker County Library's historic photo collection, I said the library would gladly archive the photos and negatives for researchers and public accessibility in perpetuity but that the library does not have storage space for the other much bulkier materials. After checking with Joan Jacobs, director of Baker Heritage Museum (formerly Oregon Trail Regional Museum), I told Greg that Joan said the museum would gratefully accept the written and printed materials.

A few days later, Greg and I used hand trucks to wheel the many large boxes to a storage room on the museum's second floor, and I took possession of about ten smaller boxes of photos and negatives for the library.

I have not yet had a chance to do more than just read content labels on some of the boxes now stored at the museum. What most attracted my attention were boxes containing Byron Brinton's notes and documents dealing with the national debate of the early 1950's about whether to construct three high dams (Brownlee, Oxbow, and Hells Canyon) on Snake River. Also controversial in the debate was how to deal with migrating salmon and whether dam construction and ownership would be federal or private. On three different occasions, Brinton testified before Congressional committees concerning hydro-electric development of Snake River, which he supported.

Museum Director Jacobs reports that the gift to the museum totals 32 boxes with labels indicating they deal with, for example, water surveys of the 50's and 60's; Oregon budget info of the 60's; political press releases of the 50's and 60's; U. S. Forest Service and BLM; education/school district of the 1960's; assorted clippings; and miscellaneous Baker City materials.

Jacobs says, "We will begin sorting through the material after the museum closes for the season at the end of October. I'm sure there will be a wealth of interesting information contained in the boxes. How fortunate we are that Mr. Brinton kept this material, as well as notes of his thoughts. I'm sure there is a whole new exhibit in there somewhere!"

After a cursory look at the contents of the boxes of photos, I can say that the bulk of the 6000-plus photos and negatives come from the '70s, '80s, and '90s mostly dealing with events in the news, such as parades, rodeos, fairs (including queens and princess photos and 4-H animals and their proud owners), engagement and wedding photos, people receiving awards, car and train wrecks, fires, and building demolition and construction.

Some of the construction photos are of Hells Canyon Dam, Wolf Creek Dam, and Interstate 80 (now I-84) through the Baker City area, one of the last stretches completed of the national interstate highway system begun in the 1950's during the Eisenhower administration.

A favorite of mine is a photo of a beaming Leo Adler receiving a life membership in the Oregon Fire Chiefs' Association with Bishop Leipzig standing at his side, taken at a fire chiefs' convention at Seaside, Oregon, on June 26, 1974.

Among the thousands of photos are several hundred from earlier decades, for example, a dramatic photo of the fire that destroyed the Clarick Theatre (Baker City Opera) in 1938; the town of Robinette now inundated by the waters of Brownlee Reservoir; and the horse-drawn trolley passing in front of Geiser Grand Hotel on its way from downtown Baker City to the railway depot.

*The Record-Courier*-Brinton Collection of photos and documents is a treasure trove of Baker County history that will keep library and museum archivists busy for years to come.