

Democrat-Herald Memoir
by
Gary Dielman

My two years of employment at the *Democrat-Herald* newspaper in Baker, Oregon, ended in the summer 1957, a watershed year for both the *Democrat-Herald* and me. I graduated from high school, and on July 1st the *Democrat-Herald* acquired a new publisher. After thirty-two years as owner-publisher, Lucien P. Arant sold the *Democrat-Herald* to new publisher Lee C. Bollinger and partners of *The Press Democrat* in Santa Rosa, California.



*Vine-covered Dean's Rooms once stood
on present site of Baker City Herald building.*

Now, almost fifty years later, the name of the newspaper has reverted to one of its original names, *Baker City Herald*, a Republican newspaper. The other half of the *Democrat-Herald's* name was *Morning Democrat*. In the late 1920's the two competing newspapers merged into the *Democrat-Herald*.

During my junior and senior years at Baker High School, I performed several jobs at the *Democrat-Herald*. After school let out in the afternoon, I processed newspapers to be mailed to out-of-town subscribers. A cabinet in my work area held drawers of metal Address-O-Graph plates each with the address of an out-of-town subscriber punched into it. I ran stacks of plates through the machine, stamping addresses on sheets of paper. Then I would roll up a newspaper in the sheet, slather some glue on one edge making sure the address was left showing. When finished, I bundled up the newspapers and delivered them to the post office.

In the evenings between six and seven o'clock, I came back to an empty office and sat at the circulation manager's desk waiting for phone calls from subscribers missed by the carriers. At seven o'clock I grabbed enough newspapers to cover the complaints and delivered them around town in my pale-green, 1950 Studebaker I had bought for \$200 specifically for the job. My first car.



Vine-covered Dean's Rooms once stood on present site of Baker City Herald building.

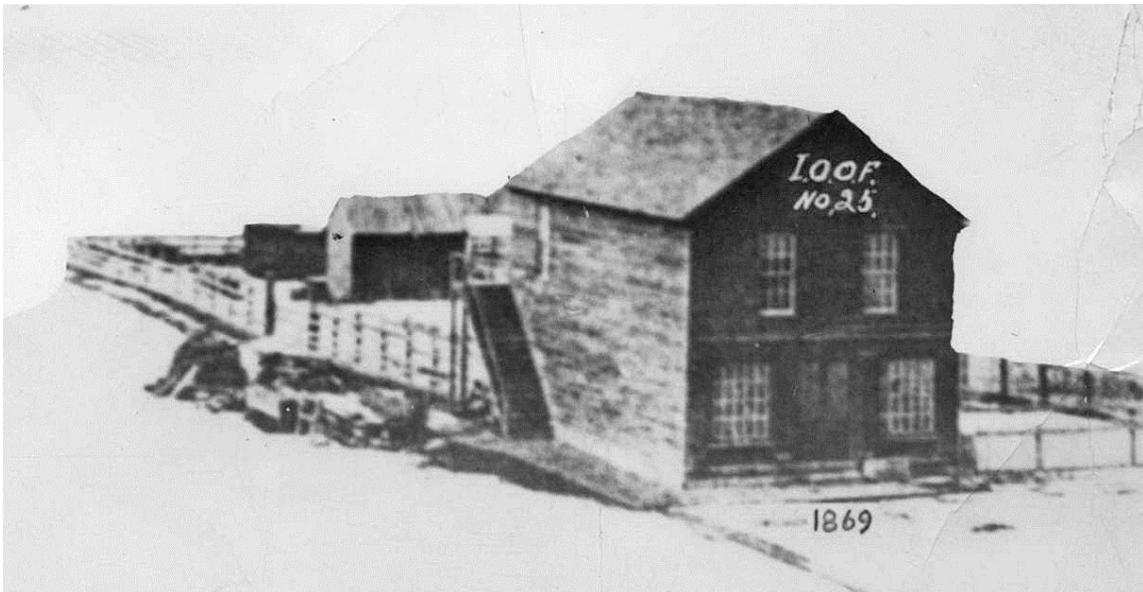
The *Baker City Herald* building has changed a lot since I worked there. Gone is the publisher's glassed-in office located in the southwest corner of the front office. Bessie Ragsdale, advertising manager at that time, had an office where today's publisher Kari Borgen's office is, only Bessie's office was smaller. The newsroom and proofreading occupied the rest of the area on the north side of the front third of the building, where advertising is today.

As you walked from the office area into the middle third of the building, you entered a large shop. On the right were several Linotype machines. One of the operators was Jesse Smurthwaite, hold-over employee from the days of the *Morning Democrat*. I can still hear the clicking of the keys, the clanking of the machines' many moving parts, and the smell and heat of hot lead. I was amazed that the machine could consume molten lead at one end and spit a solid line of cool type the width of a newspaper column out the other end.

In the middle of the right side was typesetter Harold Wright's bench. Harold, who wore a green visor, sleeve protectors, and a full-length apron, was always covered in black printer's ink. He had the ability to read mirror image, since the lines of type came out of the Linotype machine that way. A vivid memory is

Harold's whacking a board with a large wooden mallet to make sure no lines of type punched through the paper during the printing process. Today the Linotype and typesetter area is a large conference room.

As you walked further west you passed an open storage area and my work space on the right—today occupied by news staff—and then entered a hallway leading to the backdoor. In the southwest corner of the back third of the building was the carriers' room with counters down the middle and along the walls for folding of newspapers—no rubber bands in those day—and stuffing into canvas bags for draping across the handlebars of the carriers' bicycles. As soon as school was out, the room would come alive with the activity and conversations of the carriers and a few newsboys who hawked newspapers on downtown streets. Today the area contains a newspaper archive, a darkroom, and an office.



I.O.O.F. Lodge No. 25 was the first building constructed on the present site of the Baker City Herald's parking lot. Dean's Rooms may be a remodel of this building.

Across the hallway in the northwest corner of the building was the pressroom dominated by the huge press. The pressman was husky Al Mattes, who serviced and ran the press using his considerable strength to heft the trays of lead type into position. During mid-afternoon runs you had to shout to be heard above the din of all the heavy moving parts, as paper was pulled off the massive roll of newsprint, around rollers, over trays of type, and ultimately folded and plopped into a hopper at the rate of about fifty newspapers per minute. Along the west and north walls was a chest-high shelf used for stacking newspapers into routes. Today the pressroom is office and work area for the circulation department and archive for the oldest newspapers from the late 1800s and early 1900s.

After my graduation from high school, the *Democrat-Herald* hired me to work full time. Added to my job of processing the out-of-town newspapers, I worked as an office boy in the front office helping out wherever help was needed. I assisted Bessie in advertising, and, for a month, I filled in for circulation manager Lou Myers, who took a similar position at the *Bend Bulletin*. My now fondly-remembered employment at the *Democrat-Herald* ended mid-summer when I went to work for local carpenter Charlie Pope for twice the money.

© January 29, 2003, Gary Dielman, Baker City, Oregon
Revised March 2013.