

Edition (C) 575

early times days by westcott

It is not often that a newspaper is able to offer recollections from the brain of one whose memory of that newspaper goes back for nearly 40 years. It, therefore, is with great pleasure that the editor publishes the following article, one of two on early Days of the Times published in the Anniversaries Edition, the article being

by Earl Westcott

In 1900, and for more than a decade prior thereto, the plant of the Visalia Times and its correlate, the Tulare County Times, were housed in the ~~old~~ old ~~farm~~ Centennial hall. This, constituting the entire second floor of the brick building yet standing, a sturdy reminder of the days when Visalia still was young, was situated about midway on Court street between Main and Center and cornered the alley across from the Palace Hotel annex. This upper floor now is a lodging house.

Centennial hall, Visalia's first theater, called by the old timers the "opry house," was built in 1876, the 100th anniversary of the signing of the declaration of independence, whence it derived its name.

At the corner of Court and Center, where the red brick now stands, was the Milt English livery stable which, while boasting a brick front, was in fact a wooden structure extending from Court along Center to Locust in the rear. Between the stable and the theater building proper was a wide wooden stair leading to the hall above.

This hall, the length of which was east and west, and with a level floor also used for dancing, was unique in that the stage was at one side rather than at the end, that being the south side atop a smaller building, its second story of frame construction, at the alley corner. A few years ago, this second story was removed, leaving the present one-story brick.



ad one early times days by westcott

It is difficult to imagine a more complete fire hazard than this theater structure, encompassed by its various surroundings. At the one side (under the stage) was a bakery with an oven at its rear; on the other, the livery stable with its tons of dry hay and block-long tinder-like roof. Under the wooden stairway were stacked quantities of material of a combustible nature and in the theater candles, and later kerosene lamps, were employed as footlights, with similar illumination for stage and hall.

Most fortunate it was, therefore, ~~that~~ for the hundreds that from time to time crowded the spacious interior to applaud the melodramatic performance of a traveling troupe, the local talent farce or gay dancing party, that the fire which finally did occur--the fire which destroyed the livery stable on the same night the Kaweah stables on the site of the civic auditorium were destroyed also--was long after the place had ~~been~~ ceased to be used as a theater. With the fire went the wooden stairs but by good work of the fire department, mostly volunteer in those days, the building was not damaged seriously.

The store rooms below were from time to time ~~marked~~ occupied by a saloon, the Askin plumbing shop, the Locey undertaking parlors, the United States land office, the Tulare County Abstract company and numerous others.

In about 1900, the new Armory Hall, a spacious structure, had been erected at the northwest corner of Court and Acequia streets as a combination theater and headquarters for Company E, the militia company then organized, and with its completion Centennial hall as a theater ceased to exist.        nor •



ad two early day times by westcott

Armory Hall in turn passed on ~~as a theater~~ recently after having been remodeled as a theater and later abandoned. It has been torn down and a gasoline service station jo occupies the corner.

When Centennial hall went "dark" as a theater the Times moved in and the place which has so often resounded to the music of the polka, lancers schottish and quadrille, now re-echoed to the clack clack of the spick and span new Smith Premier double decked typewriter which the new owner had installed, the impact of mallet on wooden block as the type in the forms was leveled into place and the clatter and muffled thud of the flat-bed Campbell press.

The new owner was Ben M. Maddox who arried in Visalia in the fall of 1890, resigning his position in San Francisco as clerk of the California state supreme court to become the new editor and proprietor of one of the best and most widely read weeklies (the daily did not make its appearance until several years later) in that part of the state.

A democratic paper in a predominately democratic county, it was, in the old convention days, a potent force for many years in the affairs and fortunes of that party.

In 1890, however, the equipment of the plant was not much to brag about as may be noted from the accompanying photograph. Several rows of type cases (the type was set by hand in those days), the stones where the type was assembled in the form, s a medium sized job press, some tables and stools and the flat bed press, together with the usual print shop miscellany, comprised the bulk of the plant equipment.

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ad three early day times by westcott

Partitioned off the main room at the head of the stair came first the room of the city editor (a courtesy term applied to the sole reporter) in the persons for several years of R.E. Johnston, later a history teacher in the Visalia high school, and afterward by W.W. Barnes, the latter a diminutive individual with white hair and whiskers but exceedingly active and with a most excellent "nose for news."

The sole equipment of the city editor's room was a table, usually littered with exchanges, a cushioned chair, its seat very low so that its occupant's feet might reach the floor, an ugly and very smelly paste pot, a stack of copy paper and an enormous pair of shears.

To the above, during those rare instances when it was not festooned from its owner's mouth, could be added an ancient and exceedingly black corn cob pipe and the combined odor of paste pot and pipe, particularly in the presence of an over heated base burner in an adjacent room, were calculated to make even the bravest turn ~~at~~ pale.

Barnes, an old timer, and himself the former proprietor of a country newspaper, knew all the other old timers and some of his comments on how the wheat crop was doing at Poplar or Dutch Corners (it was mostly dry farming in those days), how many sheep were being grazed by Henry Quinn at Rag Gulch, the quantity of timber being logged at Dillon's mill above Milo, and the prospective harvest of prunes and peaches in nearby orchards, as evidenced by sprays of blossoms or fruit brought in for editorial inspection by proud farmers, may be read in "Forty Years Ago Today" in the Visalia Times-Delta.

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ad four early day times by westcott

Passing through this room, one entered the sanctum sanctorum, occupied by the editor and proprietor, and which was also by way of being the headquarters of the bookkeeper, the business, advertising and job departments as well as the central working point for the subscription solicitor, mailer, society editor, occasional poet and general roustabout, all of which positions in 1900 and for years thereafter, were filled with more or less dignity and grace by the ~~re~~ writer of this article.

Between times, when not otherwise engaged, there were advertisements to write, proof to read, job work to deliver and always on Thursday, the mailing of the nine-column blanket-sheet weekly--the names of its many hundred, mostly out-of-town subscribers, to be stamped out on the ancient Mustang mailer--and on Saturdays the inevitable collection of the 10-cent weekly subscription price of the daily paper. In later years, when the plant afforded its first linotype there also was the occasional night work of "setting" briefs and transcripts.

But to get back to the "front" office:

There was more furniture here. Besides the desk of the bookkeeper there was a safe, racks of newspaper files, an extra chair or two for visitors and the high backed and pigeon-holed desk of the editor on which <sup>were</sup> the typewriter and the inevitable paste pot and shears. A door opened into the big room--the job and composing room--which, with the exception of the stage, occupied the remainder of the plant headquarters.

The stage was surmounted by a low proscenium, remindful of more colorful days, but gone were curtain, tormentors, drops and footlights and the place which had once merrily resounded to popular song and the clatter of the clog, was now relegated to the lowly position of stock room.

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ad five early day times by westcott

R.A. Percival, the sandy-haired and red-complexioned foreman, and Arthur Pfanstiel, the slow moving office "devil," constituted in those days the entire composing and job room force. The former, arriving in 1890 with the advent of the news proprietorship, was a printer of parts who could set ads, make up the newspaper and turn out more and better job work than almost any other journeyman in that part of the state but he was possessed of a hair-trigger temper that was mostly on edge.

This characteristic while a source of much irritation to fellow employees was, so far as the establishment was concerned, not an unmixed blessing, for the madder he got the faster he worked.

Like Percival, Pfanstiel had been on the paper a number of years. Fast-plodding and methodical, he usually did his work well, but there was no escaping the blistering tongue of the florid foreman whose rage welled mightily if the "kid" pried a take or squirted gasoline over a carelessly laid tobacco pouch.

Also, Arthur was slow, a fault the quick-motioned Percival never could condone. Then, too, the "devil" is by newspaper tradition of long standing the designated person to "take it out on" if things go wrong. With the foreman something was usually going wrong and in this respect, at least, he believed in upholding the traditions of the craft.

In marked contrast to ~~these~~ the characteristics and general demeanor of his foreman, Ben M. Maddox, the editor and proprietor, was an affable, even tempered individual--not that he could not speak incisively when the occasion demanded--given little to criticism, a keen analyst of world affairs, knew a good story and could write a good editor  
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ad six early day times by westcott

Astute in political ways, possessed of an engaging personality and an unaffected laugh that could, at the climax of a good story, be heard the length of the block, Maddox by virtue of these qualities and the influence he commanded as editor of the Times--always hewing strict to party lines, paraded the virtues of the party candidates before a not too critical majority, while rattling the bones of the opposition--came to be looked up to as the leader of the party in the county.

As to the charge of the Delta, the republican sheet published then on the lower floor of the brick building where Buckman and Mitchell now are housed, and the leading exponent of that faith in the county, that Maddox was in fact the democratic "boss", he had little to say. Prominent in civic affairs, unselfishly devoting much of his time to the community good, the fact that his leadership extended into the realm of politics carried with it little opprobrium in a community where the life of every candidate was an open book and the procedure whereby the nomination was effected, scarcely less so.

Those were the golden days of the torch light processions, rousing political meetings, mud slinging and violent tirades in the public press. All the villainies that a candidate had committed--or might with reasonable certainty have committed--were consistently aired in the opposition paper, and found a resultant echo in the drunken brawls that were of frequent occurrence in one or more of the town's 18 saloons.

During this period the populist sun rose and set on the political horizon and ~~knarxartix~~ though parties might fuse in national affairs, in Visalia and environs, there was a well-defined cleavage, and the "pops" were quite cordially hated by members of both old parties.

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ad seven early day times by westcott

George W. Stewart, later register of the local United States land office, was then editor and proprietor of the Delta which like the Times boasted a weekly subscription list of some magnitude. A person of sterling character, fine personality and a good editorial writer, he had for city editor Harry Stuart, and for a number of years Clarence B. Lilly for his foreman.

Later in the 1890's, Alonzo Melville Doty bought into the paper, partly at least by the contribution of a linotype of the earliest vintage, the first machine of modern use to be installed in a newspaper office in this part of the state.

One February 22, 1892, after prior preparation and arrangement by the proprietors of both papers, appeared the first issues of the Visalia Daily Times and the Visalia Morning Delta, which were thereupon published continuously and without interruption until the merger ~~fixing~~ on March 1, 1928 of the Times and Delta into the Visalia Times-Delta.

After the installation of the linotype at the Delta, an arrangement was effected whereby the Times made day-time use of the machine with Frank F. Barton as the operator.

Editor's note: Another article telling of the early days of the Visalia dailies, also by Mr. Westcott appears in a nearby article of the Anniversaries Edition.

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In a nearby article, conduct of the Visalia weeklies in the early 1890's is recalled. The following discusses the early days of the dailies and also was prepared

by Earl Westcott

Neither Visalia newspaper at the time they became dailies on February 22, 1892, was much to look at if judged from modern standards, ~~xxx~~ both the Times and Delta being four page, five column sheets, set 13 ems to the column, with numerous ads and a modicum of news, but these newspapers were as good as could be reasonably expected in a town of a scant 2000 population and with a pair of scirrors~~x~~ for use in lieu of the much later telegraphic service.

During the many years of the contemporaneous incumbencies of Ben M. Maddox and George Stewart as editors respective<sup>ly</sup> of the Times and Delta, things were serene as editorials go, even during one of the hottest political campaigns of that period.

The democratic convention met in Chicago in July, 1896. Bryan made his famous "Cross of Gold" speech and the democratic party became committed to a platform calling for the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1. Later in the same month, the populist convention was held in St. Louis and a ~~xxx~~ similar platform was drafted. The republican had been held previously in J<sup>u</sup>ne, also in St. Louis, and had declared for a continuation of the gold standard.

Political flareups between the rival newspapers were usual, of course, but such personalities as were indulged in were mostly of a facetious nature, good at best for a laugh and a slap on the back when the editors met apart from the public gaze. And, if the press of one broke down, the other was quick to offer his



ad one dailies by westcott

But when Alonzo M. Doty purchased the interest of Stewart and became the sole proprietor, things began to pop both figuratively and literally. Doty was a printer and a good one and thoroughly conversant with the mechanics of the business but as to the management of a newspaper and its editorial policy, he entertained some rather remarkable and novel ideas.

As to the management, it was soon apparent that it was his intention, as quickly as possible, to increase the quantity of advertising appearing in that journal--a most laudable enterprise from a business office point of view--but in that the local field was well covered by both dailies, foreign advertising was about all that remained, and almost the only foreign advertisers who coveted space in country dailies beside the railroads, who were wont at that period to swap passes for column inches, were the patent medicine manufacturers.

Those were the golden days of the vendors of all sorts of concoctions--a little cheap whiskey in a quart of water and flavored with licorice, or cascara sagrada to give it the required medicinal flavor--was good, when at two cents a concoction there was added 10 cents worth of advertising, to produce a \$1 bottle in the drug store.

Therefore, advertising was solicited but the manufacturers didn't expect to pay much--from a quarter to half of the local tariff and usually demanded position at top or bottom of column "next to purer reading matter"--but as it came in plate form requiring no composition, or to be run as three or four line "readers" to be inserted between the personal brevities and requiring changes only once a month or so--not much work was required of the printer.

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ad two dailies by westcott

Therefore, the proffered advertising was accepted eagerly and soon the newspaper reeked with displays of liners extolling the virtues of Moan's Sovereign Remedy for Man and Beast, Judd's Blood Purifier and Kidney Tonic, Koot's Kandied Kapsules for Dandruff, Asthma and Fallen Arches, Dr. Jink's Indian Wild Root for Liver C<sup>o</sup>mplaint (or what have you?), Groan's Liniment, Bilk's Hair Restorer and Consumption Cure, Pilkin's Potent Pallets for Pallid Persons and other welladvertised and cogent curatives and sedatives for all the countless diseases and afflictions of man and beast.

When taken to task for this cupidity, greed and rapacity and what not, D<sup>o</sup>ty retaliated with a mocking diatribe of the Times for its somewhat profligate use of boiler plate (pre-set reading matter of a pseudo news character, jokes, stories and the like used as fillers)--and coined that appellation which, when referring to the editor of the Times, he proceeded to use with much glee, sometimes linked with acrimony, of "Boiler P<sup>l</sup>ate Ben."

Later the Delta, by reason of its affluence in advertising matter, was enlarged to six columns and thereafter the Times was much derided for the size of its sheet which remained at five, and in the write-up of a picnic in which the Times editor participated, the Delta related that the size of the opposition paper was so small that entire sheets were taken along as napkins.

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ad three dailies by westcott

But it was editorially (if that is the proper term to connote the matter which usually passed as such) that D<sup>U</sup>ty caused the most sensation. At the top of the column on the editorial page appeared daily some four "poems" usually of four lines each, denominated "The Local Lyre;" and, beneath, and under the title of "Musings," were several squibs of ~~savvy~~ prose, usually of a very definite local character and reference.

These latter abounded in all the way from more or less pithy and harmless comment to allusions of some intimacy, such as the fact of a popular society bud being seen on the arm of a desirable bachelor, and what a nice match it would be, to the statement that the stork was said to be hovering about the habitat of a prominent young matron and an announcement might be expected at any time.

In these modern days of sophistication similar remarks might, perhaps, create little more than a passing ripple--we listen to Walter W. chell's Sunday night radio comment of equally personal matters with casual equanimity--but back in the gay nineties and in the early part of the century, when bodices were bodices, whaleboned to the ears, and dresses were dresses which swept the pavement, remarks such as these were rated as almost intolerable indiscretions.

Some of these remarks resulted in prompt verbal castigation by the outraged husband or suitor, or the immediate stoppage of the paper. But, ~~the victim~~ in the latter case, the victim usually subscribed again or borrowed from the neighbors "just to see what this dastardly poltroon is going to say next." A few of the more grossly outraged punctuated their beratings with fisticuffs and on these occasions, when the offending editor appeared with a blackened optic, the fact brought gleeful comment and apparent approbation from the evening newspaper.



ad four dailies by westcott

In general, however, caustic comment and adverse criticism slid off like water from a duck's back, and it was not until the Times lampooned these morning effusions with a daily paraphrase, that they really got under his skin. Thus "The Local Lyre" ~~here~~ became "The Locoed Liar" and under this appellation appeared similar doggerel. One remembered by the writer as indicative of the trivial nature and the quality of verse characteristic of the "Lyre" is here quoted:

The cat and a mouse chased 'round the house,

And then came back without it,

It was so very funn that

I thought I'd write about it.

For the prose portion "Musings" was changed to "Mussings," and the effusions gushed up were composed with merriment and received by the public with hilarious acclaim.

For once Doty was mad--so hot under the collar that he said many bitter things, which of course only added to the gusto with which subsequent "Liars" and "M<sub>u</sub>ssings" were created. Finally the Times column died as the force could think of no more ~~rat~~ ridiculous things with which to annoy the rival editor, but Doty could and did and his "Local Lyre" and "Musings" continued for a number of years.

While Doty undoubtedly was erratic in many ways, he was by no means devoid of plenty of sound sense, and there were those who held his newspaper "eccentricities" to be no more than a well-studied "build-up."

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ad five dailies by westcott

At any rate, when Doty finally sold out and departed he took with him, it is said, a very nice sockfull of coin of the realm.

Early in the century, the Times afforded its first linotype. It was a proud day, indeed, when the order was placed, but many exasperating ones intervened while the car which transported it was "lost" for a time on some obscure middle western siding. Finally, however, it reached the Visalia depot and on the following Sunday was assigned for delivery at the plant. It required the combined efforts of all hands and several lusty local stevedores to hoist it atop the thoroughly rebraced star, but the feat was accomplished without accident and it was a still prouder day when the new linotype, the very latest model, was set up and ready for use.

Prior thereto, after the arrangement for use of the Delta machine, all copy had been written in the Times news room, taken to the Delta for composition and the resultant leaden slugs were transported on galleys and on foot back to the Times plant, many trips each way being required daily. As this procedure was not only wasteful of time and effort but placed a rather definite limitation on the amount of matter which could be utilized, the advent of the modern type setter ushered in for the Times, it may be said, a new mechanical era. Not long afterwards, a six-column newspaper made its appearance.

Many of the advertisements, however, continued to be hand set, as portions still are, and the practice was, after the ad had been run, to encircle the type with several turns of string that it might not pie when slipped onto a galley to await distribution.

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ad six dailies by westcott

The carrier boys at the time were three in number: Ed Farrow, son of a well known pioneer physician, Dr. E.D. ~~Farrow~~ Farrow; Morley M. Maddox, formerly editor of the Times and present general manager of the Times-Delta and Morning Delta, and Mark Wilson, (nicknamed Mike and Mickey), for many years Southern Pacific agent at Porterville and within recent months promoted to <sup>be</sup> that company's agent at Bakersfield.

Coming into the composing room somewhat ahead of schedule, and while "horsing around" awaiting the start of the press, a galley containing one of those type-wound ads was knocked from a stone into a heap on the floor. Type of a dozen fonts was scattered about. ~~xxxxxixxxxfzR~~

The irate foreman was on the scene in a jiffy and, purple with rage, Ed and Mike were instantly and explosively fired but Morley, being the son of the boss, could not well be, so his punishment was regretfully mitigated to temporary banishment, coupled with a verbal castigation which soon extended to include the city fathers for permitting such a trio of hoydens to roam unfettered and unchecked, later to the board of supervisors and the state administration, and finally to the national government with a few foreign countries thrown in for good measure. However, as the newspaper must perforce be delivered, Ed and Mike had to be hired back the same afternoon.

On October 1, 1903, the Times moved to the Magarian-Bagdoian building, then being completed on South Court street. It was as much of an undertaking to ease the heavy machinery down the stair as it had been to hoist the linotype up, but the moving was accomplished without accident.

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ad seven dailies by westcott

Ben M. Maddox, later finding the business of the Mt. Whitney Power company with which he had become affiliated, requiring his entire attention, S.B. Patrick, now deceased, became the editor, and the writer the news gatherer, which latter position s till carried with it the high sounding appellation of "city editor." Current Times business managers were J.S. McPhaill, former county superintendent of schools; E.E. Barley, Jesse D. Pritchard and J.A. Rollins .

On the Delta, Paul B. Beville, since deceased, and Fred H. Jones, the latter thereafter becoming the supreme national head of the Knights of Pythias order; and, during the tenure of the Courier--a third local newspaper which blossomed for a time--the late Will J. Ward, held corresponding reportorial positions, and a friendly collaboration existed covering a period of years.

The place of single news gatherer ~~in~~ on a daily newspaper is not in all respects a happy one. Charged with sole responsibility of filling so much gaping space (the amount depending upon the quantity of current advertising), it came at times rather a nerve-wracking business. The writer at times was, and still occasionally is, ~~harassed~~ haunted in dreams by the seeming realization that, without knowing why, the ~~gathering~~ news gathering hours have slipped by, the time for going to press is near, and the yawning chasms between those long rows of brass column rules remains almost entirely unfilled...then to awaken in a cold perspiration... to lie back thankful, very thankful, that it was only a dream.

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ad eight dailies by westcott

But in the main the chameleon-like news changes from day to day characterize the reportorial job as anything but a dull one. Like the country doctor who must, with equal adroitness, treat all cases from tularemia to house maid's knee, the jack-of-all-trades reporter must, with like facility, cover every story that "breaks" and the days when news fonts were gushing were a joy to those when even buttonholing pedestrians failed to elicit more than a few casual personals.

News in the early part of the century was of a somewhat different character. Before the advent of the movies, those were the colorful days of the traveling theatrical troupe--legitimates they were called, ~~theatertroupe~~ although perhaps illegitimates might have been the better word--and in possession of the coveted pass, the reporter became the dramatic critic. Local talent productions were covered in detail with abundant praise for each thespian.

Then there were the Native Sons' annual New Year's eve masquerade, with its hundreds of participants and scores of prizes; the spectacular Entre Nous ball of which there have been none ~~as~~ of so elaborate a character before or since; the Fourth of July celebration with its mile-long parade, the details requiring a full page description; the political rallies--the winged words of silver tongued spellbinders, speaking in a bunting-bedecked opera house from a flag bedraped rostrum to be written up at dramatic length; the doings of the city council, together with the usual sports, church, lodge and society news--and that the writer was a society editor of parts, a perusal of the flowery accounts of parties, weddings and balls with a complete description of candelabra and what the bride wore will readily disclose.

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Personals we re very important and no enterprising reporter would think of missing a train, arriving or leaving, and on both railroads there~~x~~ were a dozen or more a day. During that period a young lady friend of the writer, the teacher of the Lemon C<sup>o</sup>ve s chool, was wont on Friday evenings and sometimes oftener, to come to town on the Visalia Electric railroad, then operating into the city.

After the item announcing her arrival had appeared a half dozen times, Frank Barton, the hard working linotype operator, conceived the idea of saving work for himself and of having some fun at the expense of the writer. The next time, therefore, the item came to his keyboard announcing the young lady's advent in our midst, he inserted after it the letters "tf," meaning, in rather ungrammatical newspaper parlance, "till forbid," and indicating that the advertisement, in which connection ~~x~~ it was used, should continue to be published until stopped by the advertiser. Thereafter, the item appeared every day for two weeks until ~~the~~ an exasperated subscriber telephoned in to say that he didn't mind the young lady coming to town every day but to "for Heaven's sake, send her home occasionally!"

These were the "good old" newspaper days in Visalia, and if there be one who professes to believe that they were not more colorful and glamorous than the present, let him come forward or forever after hold his peace.

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