

1882 - 1969 Our History is One of Service

[Pittsfield Advertiser, later Valley Times]

The decade which began in 1880 brought much advancement to the town of Pittsfield even though it did not get off to a very good start. For it was in the year 1881 that fire destroyed a goodly portion of the businesses on the Main St. To quote Sanger Cook's Pittsfield on the Seabasticook : There is a saying that we grow strong in adversity. That was certainly true in 1881. The last flame had hardly been extinguished before the charred rubble was being removed and plans were in the making for a new and better business area.

About the first efforts in restoration was the decision to build an outstanding municipal building and the progress made in that direction is eloquently described in the early issues of the Pittsfield Advertiser which published its first edition in 1882. This remarkable weekly newspaper has had a most interesting history in its eighty-seven years of uninterrupted publication.

"The newspaper has throughout the years reflected the tenor of the times. It was born at the beginning of the era which saw vigorous growth in the town. There was a spirit of youth in the air that was inspiring to those who were fortunate enough to have been in Pittsfield at the time. An esprit des corps existed that drove men to do things.

"Charles B. Haskell evidently caught some of this spirit. He felt that he could help a little with a small news sheet published monthly, advertising the goods of merchants and promoting such causes as he deemed worthy.

Although others had tried a similar venture in the late seventies with the *Pittsfield Times* and failed, Mr. Haskell had the feeling that he could make his paper succeed. How well he did succeed is a matter of record.

"The first issue of the paper, 8" x 11", stated in a banner head that it was "DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY." There were plenty of ads, a few local items, a feature article concerning a fatal accident in Detroit, and a personal item which may have been inserted by the editor since it is well authenticated that he possessed a good sense of humor.

"The next edition came out in May as promised. It was larger than the first, 11" x 15½", and in addition to a fine page of local news, it included correspondence from Burnham, Detroit, Harmony, Madison, Newburg, Palmyra, Ripley, Solon and St. Albans. The front page featured a short story, the editorial page thanked the public for the warm reception of the first issue and then promoted a sales campaign that included a choice of magazines which for a small additional amount could be taken along with a year's subscription to the Advertiser. The subscription price for the Advertiser alone was thirty-five cents per year."

A perusal of the early issues of the paper reflect the fact that photography was in its infancy for there are few if any photos. Large box ads on the front page were the items which caught the eye. Within a decade or two many of the photos which did appear were of the portrait type of the persons who made the news: through their activities in town, but there were no group photos.

Another feature included in all of the early issues of paper and appearing on the inside pages, were short stories such as we find in the magazine of today. Local items were the news that made the front page. And when a new building went up in town or a new industry was started it was the occasion for the editor to put out a "special edition."

All the copies of the Advertiser from its first edition on have been bound and are now available for perusal at the Public Library. And they are fascinating.

The position of Editor has passed to many persons throughout the paper's long history. Charles Haskell maintained the position until 1895 when he sold the paper to his brother, L. O. Haskell.

Until 1911 the paper was published under this man's guidance. In that year it changed hands again and this time was taken over by a woman, Caro Murray, who ran it successfully until 1915 when it was turned over to Garfield Horne, a young man who had worked on the staff. During the war years he retained the publication of the paper and then in 1920 Irving Whitman became editor and remained at the job until his retirement in the 1950's.

Mr. Whitman was a conscientious publisher and one of the finest printers in the business. Before taking over the Advertiser he had served an apprenticeship in August with the Kennebec Journal. The first building to house the newspaper was on Park St. and was built by O. S. Haskell.

In May of 1945 J. R. Cianchette acquired control of the Pittsfield Advertiser from George Huff of Dexter and later that year bought the building that housed the paper. This building was once a part of the Going Hathorn home that was located on what is now Hathorn Park. A study of early pictures indicates that it was once the stable of the Hathorn estate.

Upon purchase of the building a complete overhauling was underway. A one-story addition was built on the rear, the old wooden floor was taken out and replaced with concrete for the heavy machinery, the heating plant was revamped and a front office added.

Under the Cianchette regime there were a number of editors, all of whom contributed importantly toward improving the paper. The first was Marshall Hammond and he was followed by Richard Kendall, Ralph Long, Rev. William Willoughby, Rev. Donald Hinckley, Edward Stanley and Gerald Hackett. Norval Lewis served briefly as interim editor. Rev. Willoughby, Rev. Hinckley and Mr. Stanley served as part time members of the staff.

Other officers of the paper were listed as J. R. Cianchette, President; Roy U. Sinclair, Treasurer and Editor; and Irving Whitman, Production Manager.

After nearly two decades of ownership, Mr. Cianchette sold the paper to David Olson, who published it for less than a year. Today it is owned by the Pittsfield Publishers, Inc., with Gerald Mitchell as Managing Editor. In 1968 the name of the weekly publication was changed to the VALLEY TIMES.