

Danville Republican

Founded: 1846

Location: East side of square, north of post office, Danville (1846); courthouse; northeast corner of square, over W. A. King's Grocery; north side of square, over H. M. Smith's Drug Store; corner of Main and Jefferson Streets; 6 West Main Street (1996)

Joseph Graham and Henry G. Todd began publication of the *Advertiser* (later the *Weekly Advertiser*), a Whig weekly, in Danville in 1846. Todd and a group of citizens purchased a press and gave it to Graham for the express purpose of establishing a newspaper in the town. Originally from Kentucky, where he studied medicine at Transylvania University in Lexington, Todd arrived in Danville in 1831 and practiced medicine there for the next fifty-three years. He soon sold his interest in the paper to W. H. H. Lewis, who assumed sole ownership of the *Advertiser* in July 1849 and retained complete control until August 1853.

From 1853 through the Civil War, a period of rising sectional tensions, ownership of the paper shifted often, with men of intense political commitment often asserting control over what became a Republican newspaper. For example, Peter S. Kennedy briefly held an interest in the paper in 1853 and again between 1855 and 1857. Kennedy was a lawyer who, like Todd, was originally from Kentucky. He was a temperance man and passionate opponent of slavery from a young age. In 1860 he authored a pamphlet outlining what he considered the dangers slavery posed to northern workingmen; it became one of the most effective documents in the Republican campaign. In 1856 Kennedy and William P. Gregg owned the *Advertiser* and renamed it the *Hendricks County Republican*.

Many of the men involved in the ownership of the paper over the next ten years enlisted in the Union army once war broke out, and the paper, which was renamed in turn the *Bulletin* and later the *Ledger* (a name it held through much of the war), was a stout Unionist organ. Kennedy, Gregg, and Lawrence S. Shuler, investors at different points before the war, all responded to President Abraham Lincoln's first call for volunteers and enlisted in Company A of the Seventh Indiana Volunteer Infantry. Warner Vestal, the *Ledger*'s editor and part owner in 1861, volunteered with the Seventh Infantry as well. The paper was published by the Vestal brothers throughout much of the war. In April 1864 Shuler returned from the war, purchased the paper, and renamed it the *Hendricks County Union*. "To preserve the Union, soldiers must vote at elections as well as fight in the field," the newspaper's banner declared. A year later Shuler sold the paper to James L. Singer.

John N. Scarce purchased the *Union* in March 1866 and published it for the next thirteen years. After February 1874 the paper was known as the *Danville Union*. J. E. Sherrill purchased the *Union* in January 1879 and merged it with the *Republican*, which he had begun shortly before in opposition to the *Union*. Sherrill's newly merged paper, however, soon failed. A new *Hendricks County Union* appeared on 30 January 1879, published by A. S. South and Robert F. Hathaway. Sherrill sold the assets of his defunct newspaper to the new firm within a few weeks of the new paper's founding. With the addition of S. F. Wishard and James B. Greene as investors a short time later, the firm of South, Hathaway, and Company came to be the publisher of the *Hendricks County Union*.

The *Union* underwent several changes of ownership, until it was purchased by N. Bowen and James O. Parker, owners of the *Republican*, in February 1882 and, after two months, merged with that organ. Parker and Bowen established the *Republican* in October 1881. Parker, later a prominent local attorney and businessman, consolidated the *Hendricks County Democrat* as well as the *Hendricks County Union* into the *Republican* in the first half of the 1880s, a period when he held a stake in the paper. James C. Ochiltree owned the paper from around 1886 until March 1890, when Julian D. Hogate purchased it. Following Hogate's purchase, the *Republican* experienced a period of remarkable stability in ownership. Born in Danville in 1868 and graduated from DePauw University in 1891, Hogate had served as local editor of the paper since 1888. He published the newspaper for forty years and built it into a leading Republican weekly. Hogate became prominent in the state Republican party. The *Republican* was a family operation. Indeed, Hogate's bride, Etta Cravens Hogate, recalled returning from the couple's weeklong honeymoon trip to the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 to begin work at the newspaper. She was a regular contributor to the paper and a local community leader. The Hogates' two sons grew up working on the paper as well.

In August 1931 Hogate retired and sold a controlling interest in the newspaper to Edward J. (Pug) Weesner. Weesner's father, a letter carrier and printer, moved his family from California to his native Hendricks County when Edward was just a baby. Weesner served in the army during World War I and learned the newspaper business through his work in a press and censor unit and as circulation manager for *Stars & Stripes*, the military's newspaper. Weesner started at the *Republican* as a Linotype operator in 1921. The county newspaper focused on local news, relying on nonstaff local

correspondents for much of its news. Weesner, his daughter Betty Jean Weesner, and a small staff was still using a handpress to produce the ten-cent weekly in the mid-1960s. The circulation was 2,600.

Weesner owned the paper until his death in 1974, when it was passed to Betty Jean, who had assisted her father in the editorial department from the time she was a child. Betty Jean wrote school news when in the fourth grade and covered sports when in high school. In 1961 she became the paper's sole editor and in 1965 became president. The paper was printed in the Main Street office in Danville until 30 October 1975. The difficulties of purchasing small lots of newsprint led to the paper being printed off site in Lebanon. By the paper's 150th anniversary, the *Republican* was essentially a two-person operation, being produced by Betty Jean and longtime assistant Barbara M. Robertson.