

Jackson County Banner

Founded: 1869

Location: 116 East Cross Street, Brownstown (1955, 1998)

William Frysinger began publishing the *Brownstown Banner* on 1 April 1869. Frysinger, a native of Pennsylvania and an ardent Democrat, had gained valuable experience working at several party newspapers in the Keystone State cities of Hanover, Lewistown, and Lock Haven. In 1861 he moved to Brownstown and bought the *Jackson Union*. He continued the paper's traditional Democratic stance but ran into opposition from patrons for his call to support the Union during the Civil War. He retired from the *Jackson Union*, at least in part, because of patron discontent. For six years after his retirement from the paper in 1863, he ran a grocery store.

In 1869 several prominent residents approached Frysinger and, with an inducement of \$200, persuaded him to start a new weekly, the *Banner*. The *Jackson Union* had moved to Seymour in 1866. A fight over the location of the county seat was heating up, and city residents wanted a journal loyal to Brownstown to plead the case for the seat staying in their community. Frysinger proved a worthy champion for his adopted hometown. He served two terms as township trustee, helped found several businesses, including a savings and loan, fought the removal of the county seat, and helped lead the petition to incorporate the town.

Frysinger wanted subscribers to his new paper to know, however, that he would not always toe the party line. The new masthead included a subtitle that read, "An Independent Democratic Journal." About six months after founding the journal Frysinger sold it to Henry M. Beadle. Beadle had purchased the *Jackson Union* from Frysinger in

1863, and it was he who had moved it to Seymour in 1866. Beadle had tried his hand at founding his own newspaper, the *Brownstown True Democrat*, but it had failed less than a year after its first issue. Beadle could not find success with the *Banner* either, selling the newspaper back to Frysinger about a year after he acquired it. While its editor, however, Beadle enlarged the edition to a five-column folio.

When Frysinger bought the paper back he enlarged it to a five-column quarto, published every Wednesday, and running as many as eight pages. Most community newspapers of the period devoted much of the paper to national events, but local news and personal information from around the area always covered the front page of the *Banner*. A reader could find a small amount of national and international news on page two. Frysinger's editorials consistently backed the Grange movement and other labor activities in the 1870s. By 1886 the paper had eight hundred to one thousand subscribers.

Carl Brayfield joined the paper as a partner in early 1879. He printed a daily and a triweekly edition of the paper under the titles the *Daily Banner* and the *Tri-Weekly Budget*. These editions did not last long, however, and the partners stopped publishing them within seven months of their first appearance; Brayfield left the partnership shortly afterward.

In 1887 Frysinger again sold the journal, this time to Hal E. Case and C. S. Mercer. Case quickly bought Mercer's shares only to sell the paper back to Mercer in 1890. Five years later Frysinger reacquired the *Banner*, retaining possession until his death in early 1896. Frysinger's widow appointed Andrew J. Brodhecker as editor. Within two years Brodhecker bought the enterprise from Mrs. Frysinger. The format in

the 1890s was no different than that of twenty years before. Even the price remained the same: \$1.25 for a year's subscription.

Brodhecker was the son of German immigrants and a native of Jackson County. He had worked for the *Banner* since graduating from Brownstown High School in 1887, beginning as a printer's devil and advancing to stock foreman three years later. After Frysinger's death, Brodhecker became the paper's editor and then owner. In 1898 a fire destroyed the *Banner's* building. Brodhecker never missed an issue, however; while he sought new quarters the paper was published in Cincinnati and shipped to Brownstown. By 1910 the price of a subscription was only \$1.00 per year, a significant drop over its 1869 price. Brodhecker dropped the subtitle that Frysinger had added to the newspaper and tacked on another column, continuing to publish the journal on Wednesdays.

Brodhecker continued as editor of the paper until his death in 1939. He made two of his sons, Claude and Rolland, partners in the business before 1920. Both brothers attended Indiana University at the same time and shared the title of editor-in-chief of the *Indiana Daily Student* during their senior year. In 1924 Claude sold his interest in the business to Rolland. Claude had worked on the *Banner* since his graduation from high school, except for a three-year stint with the *Kokomo Dispatch* that ended in 1930.

Before Andrew's death the *Banner* was truly a family-operated business. By 1931 five of the paper's nine employees, who printed 3,000 copies a week, were family members. Rolland owned half the business and contributed various articles; Lou, Andrew's third son, was an assistant reporter; and Andrew's twin sister, Margaret, acted as the assistant local editor. After Andrew's death, ownership was shared between

Rolland and his mother, Cora. He became the sole owner of the business after her death in 1950.

In 1965 Rolland sold the business to Dan Hey, Jr. Hey had attended the University of Missouri and had spent more than a decade in the United States Army. He gained his first experience in journalism working for the *Stars and Stripes* in Darmstadt, Germany. He was the son of a Democratic state senator and continued the traditional stance of the paper in favor of the nation's oldest political party.

By 1967 the *Banner* enjoyed a readership of around 12,000. Interestingly, in keeping with its local interest, the paper continued to report into the 1970s on visitors to the small towns in the area, a practice abandoned by many local journals much earlier. Hey sold the *Banner* in 1972 to John and Maureen Pesta and their partner, Harry N. Kindred. In 1973, because of poor health, Kindred sold his share in the journal to Walter McCormick, who in turn sold his share to the Pestas a year later.

The Pestas had moved from Kenosha, Wisconsin, to southern Indiana in 1971 when John became editor of the *County Press* in Salem. Maureen also worked at the paper part time. The couple had met in South Bend where he attended Notre Dame and she took classes at St. Mary's College. After they graduated he went on to graduate school, eventually becoming a Fulbright Fellow and an instructor at a University of Wisconsin extension. After the *County Press* was sold they bought the *Brownstown Banner*. At the *Banner* Maureen took an active role in writing articles, drawing cartoons, and providing artwork, while John both edited and wrote articles for the paper. In February 1974 the Pestas began publishing the paper twice weekly, and by 1986 they offered readers two sections and up to twenty-four pages of news in each issue. The

Democratic stance of the paper continued, as Congressman Lee Hamilton wrote a regular column and the rare editorials favored the Democratic party.

A local corporation, Jackson County Banner, Incorporated, acquired the paper from the Pestas in March 1989. The company's shareholders included Kenneth A. Layton, a lawyer from Seymour, and a Brownstown couple, Joseph and Judy Persinger. The group has continued a tradition of excellence. In the 1920s the paper received a silver cup from a journalism fraternity for its excellent coverage. Seventy years later Joseph Persinger won a prize given by the state press association for best editorial writing. In addition, the *Banner* could boast of having an overseas correspondent in the mid-1990s. Janet Peters, a sergeant in the United States Army Reserve's mobile public affairs department, went to Bosnia in 1997. She wrote articles for both the army and the *Banner* during her tour.

The team changed the name of the paper to the *Jackson County Banner* in the early 1990s to reflect its countywide circulation. In 1998 Joseph Persinger continued as editor. The company employed five and expected sales of approximately \$500,000. Each issue contained as many as three sections and ran from twelve to eighteen pages. The paper remained centered on Jackson County, with a regular column focusing on the Jackson County of yesteryear, reports on social happenings and hospital stays, and other news of local interest.