

Orleans Progress Examiner

Founded: 1879

Location: Cloud Building, north side of town square on Maple Street, Orleans (1879); West Jefferson Street (–1977); 233 South Second Street (1977–)

The *Orleans Examiner* made its debut in May 1879. The five-column quarto was published by H. J. Cooper and backed the Republican party. In 1883 Cooper sold the weekly to Emmett Harris. W. H. Talbott bought the journal in 1886, selling it less than a year later to Lou Black.

After selling the *Examiner*, Cooper left for Florida, and with him went one of the paper's former employees, Charles H. Busick, who had begun working for the *Examiner* at age sixteen. Busick returned to Indiana in 1890, and the next year, in September 1891, he and Fred E. Kimbley purchased a printing press from L. C. Wright, publisher of the recently defunct *Orange County Times*. Busick and Kimbley established a new paper, the *Orleans Progress*, which was politically independent, as forcefully proclaimed in the first issue. The partners distributed the seven-column folio every Thursday morning, and a year's subscription \$1.00. A decade after Busick's return to the Hoosier State, he and Kimbley bought the *Examiner* and merged it with their paper, forming the *Orleans Progress Examiner*. While the *Progress* had stayed neutral in politics, the new paper's editorial page supported the Republican party.

In 1909 Kimbley died, and Busick formed a stock company that assumed ownership of the weekly. After his partner died, Busick published an eight-column folio. Advertisements could be found on the top of page one, while local happenings and local school activities were placed under the headings of "Local Notes" or "School Notes."

Personal items from each town in Orange County, such as who visited whom for dinner or tales of distant travel, could be gleaned on nearly every page, along with political and economic news sprinkled within each column.

Busick remained the publisher of the paper until his death in 1941. During his long tenure many changes took place in the format of the weekly, but throughout the years the paper continued to serve the needs of Orleans and Orange County. In 1916 the company published Orleans High School's first yearbook, and by that time the newspaper had expanded to six pages, had added an additional column, and had given more space to national and state news. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the editors added more coverage of sporting events, especially for Orleans High School, and continued to relate to readers what was going on in the personal lives of those around the county. The price of the paper, at \$2.00 per year in 1924, dropped to \$1.50 by 1935, and the number of pages increased from six to around ten each week. By the mid-1930s more pictures appeared in each issue, a syndicated health column advised subscribers on diet, and a section titled "In the Week's News" provided small pictures and short informative captions of events from around the world. Political editorials were few, but material concerning government or the nation's leaders tended to side with Republican party philosophy. In an attempt to provide its subscribers with a convenient service, during the 1930s the *Progress Examiner* allowed customers of the local electric company to pay their bills at the paper's offices.

In 1924 William M. Busick, Charles's son, joined with Henry Smith to purchase a portion of the business. The new partners bought the *Paoli News* sometime later in the 1920s, and Smith became its manager. Smith had begun his publishing career as a

printer's devil for the *Salem Democrat* at the age of fourteen and had owned the paper for a while. Busick and Smith owned the *News* until 1954, when they sold it to John Riley. After the sale, Smith retained the post of editor, keeping the job into the late 1960s.

William Busick, who took over as editor and publisher of the *Progress Examiner* in 1941, grew up helping his father run the paper. After two years of service in the army during World War I, he returned to Orleans and became the Linotype operator and a business partner in the firm. William continued as editor until 1959, when he turned the duties over to his son Robert Busick. In the early 1940s the paper included only four pages per issue, probably because of wartime paper rationing. It reported on the activities of Orange County soldiers and covered the most important local and state news. It also continued to back the Republican party, officially becoming a member of the party's editorial association, and included a Washington report from Congressman Earl Wilson. By the late 1950s the editor began to organize the news in a paragraph-style column format, and each issue ran ten pages in length. The weekly kept its small-town feel by continuing to include reports on personal news from each community in the county. William and his mother, Addie Busick, bought Smith's share in the *Progress Examiner* in 1954. The partners changed the paper from a twenty-four-inch, eight-column format to a twenty-inch, seven-column one.

Robert Busick began his duties at the *Progress Examiner* at the age of eight. His job was to take newspapers in his red wagon to the post office for mailing. After attending school in New York he returned to become the Linotype operator at the family business. He again took up the Linotype duties after he returned from a tour of duty with the navy during World War II. In 1961 William Busick died, and Robert and his mother,

Mae, divided William's half interest in the company. In 1962 the firm bought a Miehle flatbed, the paper's first new printing press since before America's entry into World War I. After Addie Busick died in 1965 Robert and Mae decided to sell their shares in the business. Mae continued as the business manager for the paper until 1978.

Robert T. Black of Bloomington bought the weekly at public auction on 18 November 1966. Black, a former manager of the *Indiana Daily Student*, changed the paper's operations from hot-type to offset printing in 1967. A large headline now greeted readers in each ten-page issue. Black continued to include personal items in the weekly and employed town correspondents to gather the news. A year's subscription was not much more than in the 1940s, only \$2.50 a year. Black tired of the business, however, and sold the *Progress Examiner* to John F. and Linda Hill Noblitt in 1968.

The Noblitts made several changes to the paper, including buying new photography and typesetting equipment. Before buying the weekly neither of the Noblitts had previous publishing experience. John, a native of Orleans, owned a construction company and a plumbing, heating, and electrical business before buying the paper. Like many of the publishers before, John and Linda were active in the community, including stints on the city board, fire department, chamber of commerce, and various clubs and Masonic organizations. Under their leadership, the *Progress Examiner*, like many community newspapers in the 1970s, stopped publishing personal news from the towns in Orange County. By the mid-1970s the editors had scaled the paper back a bit, to eight pages and six columns, and the price of a year's subscription had risen to \$5.00 a year.

In the early 1980s Becky and Norman Grissom edited and published the journal. The new editors changed the format back to a paragraph column style, which had been

abandoned in the mid-1960s, and began issuing the paper on Wednesdays. They also brought back some personal notes of visits and vacations.

John Noblitt again became the editor and publisher in the mid-1980s, retaining the format implemented by the Grissoms but changing the publication date back to Thursday. He added two to four pages of text per issue, including an Orleans Elementary School and an Orleans High School page, written by aspiring young journalists. In the 1990s the number of pages per issue stretched to as many as sixteen, and the six columns of space made the paper seem less dense and easier to read than before. Beyond newspaper publishing, Noblitt kept a hand in politics, winning the post of county auditor on the Republican ticket in 1996. In 1999 he continued as the publisher and editor. The company employed five people, and sales were expected to be approximately \$500,000.