

Sullivan Daily Times

Founded: 1854

Location:

Democrat: Second floor of Howard & Wolfe's Store, southeast corner of Section and Washington Streets, Sullivan (1854–59); unknown site of frame building (1859–70); north side, public square (1870–1901); south side of Jackson Street (1901–67)

Times: Second floor, Masonic Building, Sullivan (1884); North Court Street (1896); 115 West Jackson Street (1901–)

J. J. Mayes, a resident of Vincennes, moved to Sullivan and set up the town's first newspaper, the *Democrat*, in August 1854. Five of the town's most prominent Democratic party supporters, Joseph W. Wolfe, John S. Davis, Isaac Stewart, Joseph Gray, and William Wilson provided twenty-five dollars each and further bank endorsements to finance the weekly. The first issue was a five-column folio. After only one issue Mayes returned to Vincennes, and the five Democrats hired Samuel Farley and Samuel R. Hamill to print and edit the weekly. After the 1854 elections Farley and Hamill left town and the paper was suspended for a short time. The owners then turned to Murray Briggs in hopes of recouping some of their investment. At age twenty-five and with ten years of experience in the publishing business, Briggs purchased the paper in April 1855.

Briggs continued as both publisher and proprietor until his death in September 1896. By the end of 1855 he had expanded the paper to a six-column folio, but most of the space in the paper was dedicated to advertising. Included inside each week's issue were poetry and serials, but the majority of the print, outside of advertising, focused on political issues. Until the 1860s mailing the weekly took up almost half a day's time, in part because each issue sent through the post required a handwritten address label. In

1869 Briggs added a cylinder press and in 1881 he introduced steam power and a Campbell press to the office. By the 1880s the paper had developed into a seven-column folio, with more local news included in the coverage, including personal items. In 1883 Briggs started publishing the paper twice weekly.

Preferring peace, Briggs opposed the Civil War, but once the war erupted he grudgingly supported the Union. After the war ended he helped organize a building and loan in Sullivan and helped spearhead the temperance movement in the community. He also served as a school board member and received an appointment from Indiana governor James D. Williams to the board of trustees of what would later become Indiana State University. After Briggs's death his sons inherited the paper, but they decided not to follow their father in the publishing profession and sold the *Democrat* to S. Paul Poynter in July 1897.

Poynter, a Monroe County native, graduated from the Cloverdale school system in Putnam County and then from DePauw University in 1897. He bought the *Democrat*, according to one source, when the paper "was at low ebb and developed it into a profitable establishment." Like many small-town newspapermen of the era, he was active in his community and in state politics. He was elected to the presidency of the Indiana Democratic Editorial Association after the turn of the twentieth century and served as an official board member of the local Methodist church for a number of years.

Poynter made several changes to the *Democrat*. He reduced the price from \$1.50 for a year's subscription to \$1.00. He returned its publication schedule to that of a weekly and increased its size. The majority of the material included in each issue tilted toward Democratic party news and opinions, with the latest agricultural advancements, serials,

and personal news thrown in as well. In 1901 Poynter moved the paper to a facility on Jackson Street. Three years later he bought the paper's main Democratic rival, the *Times*, and continued to publish the *Times* as the daily edition of the *Democrat*.

George W. Basler began the predecessor of the *Times*, the *Sullivan True Democracy*, on 4 February 1878. The paper was meant to give a voice to Democrats who were opposed to some of the editorial comments of the *Democrat*. Dr. J. C. Bartlett, a native of Marietta, Ohio, bought the journal in May 1881 and renamed it the *Times*. He bought new presses for the paper, a Prouty power and a Universal jobber, thus making the *Times* one of the better-equipped printing offices in the area. Six years later D. Oscar Groff acquired the weekly then sold it two years afterward to Charles W. Wellman. Around 1894 Richard Park purchased the paper and started a daily edition that did not succeed. Two years later Park sold the weekly to Orion B. Harris.

Harris, who served as judge of the circuit court of Sullivan and Greene Counties from 1900 to 1906, added a bindery service to the printing plant in 1896, diversifying the company's services and making it more profitable. He held on to the paper for five years before selling it to William B. Aiken in 1901. A year later Charles Wellman again purchased the Democratic weekly. Wellman, a local attorney and real estate broker who was elected superintendent of public schools in 1891, attempted a daily edition for the second time soon after buying the newspaper, and this time the venture succeeded. By 1904, however, Wellman again tired of the *Times*, selling it to Dirrelle Chaney and Robert P. White, who quickly turned it over to Poynter.

Poynter changed the name of the tabloid from the *Evening Times* to the *Daily Times* in 1905. The paper, which was published six days a week, ran seven columns in

width and four pages in length. National and state political news dominated the tabloid in 1906, but serials and personal items interrupted the serious news. By 1920 the average run of the paper had reached six pages, pictures had been added to the format, and the price had increased to \$3.50 a year. Poynter hired his twelve-year-old son, Nelson, to be the court reporter for the *Times*. In the early 1920s Arthur G. McGuire became the editor of the paper after Paul and Nelson Poynter moved to St. Petersburg, Florida. Nelson Poynter later turned the sleepy *St. Petersburg Times* into a Pulitzer Prize-winning journal.

Under McGuire's editorship, the *Democrat* was issued as the Saturday edition of the *Daily Times* (from 1925 to 1934 it carried the title of the *Times-Democrat*). With the departure of Paul and Nelson Poynter, publishing responsibilities fell to Eleanor P. Jamison, Paul Poynter's daughter. Jamison, an Indiana University graduate, inherited both papers when her father died in 1950.

The format of the *Daily Times* went through numerous changes under Jamison's management. By the early 1930s large headlines screamed across the entire front page. The paper became more organized, with news arranged by subject, such as sports or society items. The large headlines disappeared by the late 1940s, but the number of columns had increased to eight and a religious column had been added. The price rose from \$4.00 a year in the 1940s to \$5.00 less than a decade later, remaining at that price until near the end of Jamison's tenure. Personal items continued to be included in the daily into the late 1960s, although such information steadily decreased over the years.

In 1957 Jamison added to her newspaper holdings by purchasing the *Sullivan Union* from Robert P. White, an old friend of the family whose deteriorating health

prevented him from continuing his work. Isaac M. Brown had launched the *Union* in 1866 as a Republican party organ. Jamison's stature also continued to grow in the publishing community. She became the first woman to serve on the board of the Hoosier State Press Association and the first woman to be elected president of the Indiana Democratic Editorial Association.

By the late 1960s, however, Jamison was ready to get out of the publishing business. She discontinued the weekly *Democrat* after its 4 October 1967 run, and in 1972 she sold the *Daily Times* and the *Union* to Rex E. Pierce.

Pierce changed the way the *Daily Times* was published after he took control. He replaced the hot metal press with a Harris offset press, increased the number of staff in the editorial and advertising departments, and changed the look of the paper to a more modern modular layout. The focus of the paper switched to more local news, and the number of columns fell to six, which allowed for much easier reading of the eight pages in each issue. Pierce hired several capable editors during his tenure, including Max Jones, who remained at the paper for a decade.

When Pierce died in May 1981, his wife, Sarah J. Pierce, took over. Under Sarah's direction, the company discontinued publication of the *Union* in 1988, but it purchased the *Dugger Post* in 1985 from Sandra Laughlin and the *Farmersburg News* in 1988 from the Jewett family. In the late 1980s the company employed twenty-one full- and part-time employees and began to use a computer system for most of its departments. The basic format of the paper did not change, however, even though changes in the publishing process could have allowed for major alterations to the paper's layout.

Sarah hired her daughter, Nancy Pierce Gettinger, and her son-in-law, Thomas Gettinger, to manage the *Times* in the mid-1980s, turning over full control of the journal to them in the early 1990s. The couple ceased publishing the *Dugger Post* in 1995 and switched to a Macintosh computer production process for their two remaining papers. Nancy graduated from Indiana University's School of Journalism in 1984. Tom, also a graduate of Indiana University, attended graduate school at the University of Illinois and was, like several editors of the *Times* before him, elected to the presidency of the Indiana Democratic Editorial Association and to the board of the Hoosier State Press Association in 1995.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, the *Daily Times* and the *Farmersburg News* employed fifteen full-time staff members and operated as a division of the Pierce Oil Company. Sales were expected to reach more than \$1 million in 1999. The *Daily Times* continued to be published as a broadsheet and averaged ten pages per issue. As in the past, the daily brought its readers the latest in both local and national news and remained a member of the Indiana Democratic Editorial Association.