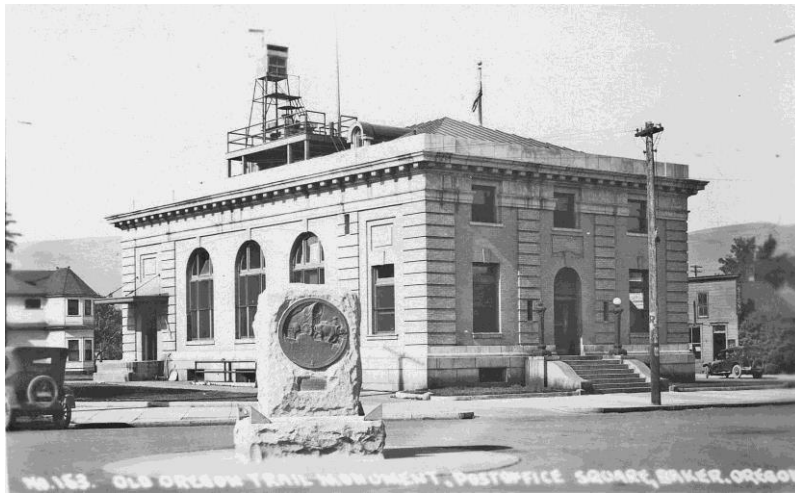


Early History of Baker City's Old Post Office Square by Gary Dielman

For much of Baker City's history, Old Post Office Square was the town's center and the Oregon Trail Monument was its hub. Those were the days when that favorite teenage pastime "dragging the gut" involved driving up Main Street, circling the monument, and then back down Main. That traffic pattern changed about fifteen years ago, when the monument was moved from the center of the square to a new plaza on the north side of the Old Post Office.



Old Post Office Square has seen many other changes over the years. One of my favorite photos of the square dates to about 1866. Several freight wagons and a small herd of cattle occupy the center of the square. Behind them, on the present site of the Chevron Station and *The Record-Courier* office stood the little town's first hotel, two-story Baker City House.



*Old Post Office Square, ca. 1865.
Baker City House sat on site of today's Chevron Station.*

In 1886, all buildings in that block burned in a huge fire. In rebuilding the block, wood was out and brick was in. The two-story brick buildings survive today, but at the south end of the block, four one-story brick buildings are gone. They occupied two-thirds of that end of the block, leaving room for another structure.



*1700 block of Main burned in 1886. Wood buildings replaced by brick.
The one-story building gave way in 1934 to today's Chevron Station.*

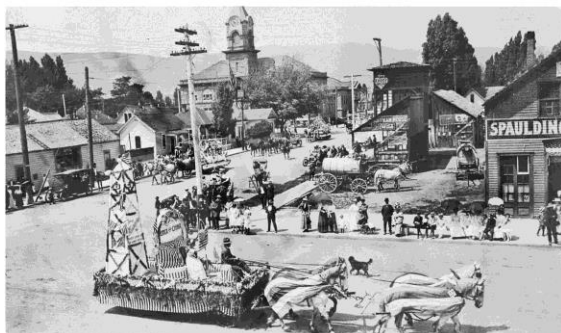
In 1890, a prosperous Chinese resident built a two-story brick mansion on that site with an address of 1703 Resort. By 1895 the residence was acquired by Grace Aldrich, who turned the mansion into a brothel. She was succeeded as madam by Jenny Duffy. Business must have been good, since the building grew from two to three stories. In 1906 city authorities put the brothel out of business, at least at that site. For the next three decades, the mansion was run as a legitimate boarding house.



*Mansion in the middle was a brothel until 1906.
 Located on east end of today's Chevron Service Station.
 Part of Chinatown at lower right.*

In late 1933, the four one-story brick buildings and the mansion at the south end of the 1700 block were razed to make way for a Standard Oil Company service station, now Chevron.

In 1929 on the northwest corner Old Post Office Square, Baker City's most imposing structure, Hotel Baker, was built in less than a year's time. But from Baker City's very earliest days until the hotel's construction that corner lot was just that, an empty lot with parking for water wagons used for dust abatement on downtown streets. The next lot to the north was occupied by a very large livery stable and stage stop owned by Sylvester Grier and various partners. Attached to the north side of the stable was a Wells Fargo Express office.



*These photos show the west side of 1700 block of Main St., ca. 1910.
 In November 1928 the livery stable was razed to make room for Hotel Baker.*



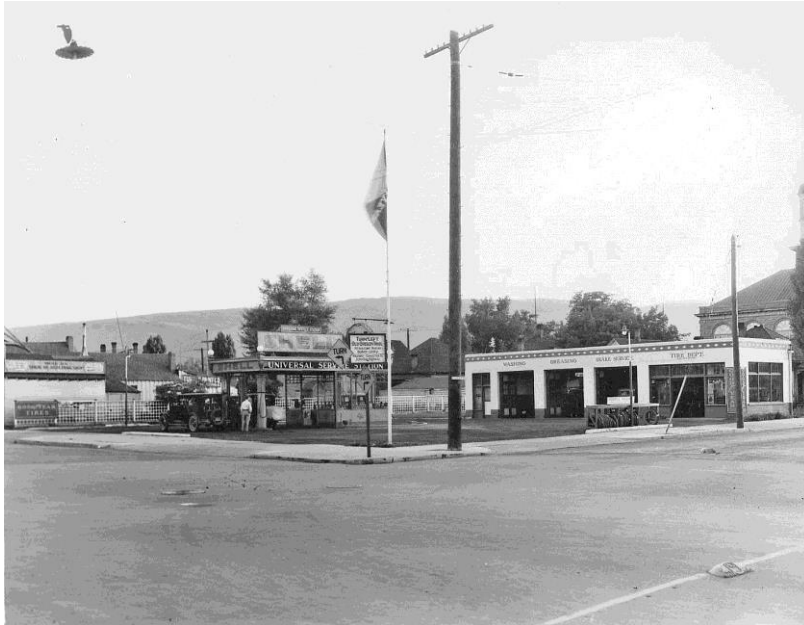
*Hotel Baker opened in August 1929.
Construction was completed in just 9 months.*

Continuing counterclockwise around Old Post Office Square, an early photo of the southwest corner of the intersection of Main and Auburn streets shows the photography studio of Martin Hazeltine. In 1884, Hazeltine, who was already famous for his photographs of northern California, the Northwest, and Alaska, decided to settle down in Baker City. The narrow front of Hazeltine's building faced Dewey with the long side of the building running west along Auburn. The front third of the building was a photography store and the middle third housed Hazeltine's portrait studio with a large north-side window plus skylight, which provided natural light for his photography.

Hazeltine and his wife, Barbara, whose children were already grown, lived in the west end of the building. The Hazeltines lived the rest of their lives in Baker City and are buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery.



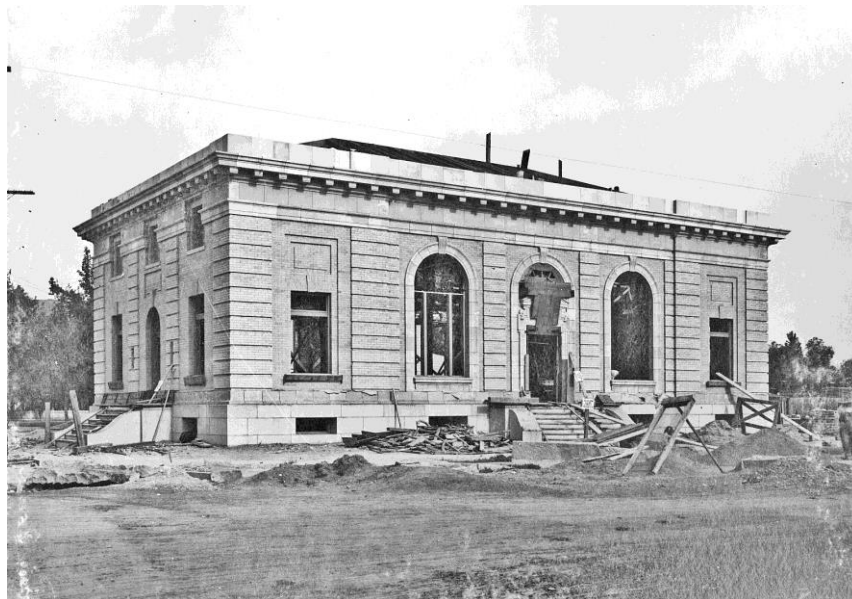
*Southwest corner of Main & Auburn, ca. 1925.
Building on corner was M. M. Hazeltine's photography studio,
which was replaced by a Shell Station.*



Shell Service Station, ca. 1935.

On the west side of Dewey south of Hazeltine's building, were small stores, including Sam Sing's washing and ironing and a Singer sewing machine shop. In the 1930's those buildings were razed to make way for a Shell service station.

In 1888, the southeast corner of Auburn and Dewey streets was occupied by Julius Lach's Eagle Brewery, which included the brewery, a bowling alley, and, not surprisingly, a saloon. On the back portion of the lot was a stable. By 1895 the brewery had burned down. A 1903 map shows a "temporary stone cutting shed" on the corner of the lot and a notation "abandoned stone foundation" on the east side of the shed, no doubt referring to remaining evidence of Eagle Brewery.



Federal Building and Post Office under construction in 1910.

In 1910, the Federal government constructed a new post office on the site, today's Old Post Office, which just celebrated its 100th anniversary. Local attorney William Lachner was installed as first postmaster in the new structure, which was constructed of imported stone that gleams almost white in contrast to the gray native tuff stone used in many of Baker City's major edifices. Lachner was the uncle of lifelong resident and businessman Joe O'Connor, now deceased, and great-uncle of Baker City's Ann Kniesel.

In 1889, east from the brewery/post office corner was a modest one-story dwelling, a couple of small wagon shops, and next to the river a livery stable and feed barn on the site of today's Bridge Street Inn.

By 1895, the brothel on the northwest corner of Auburn and Resort had competition from Fanny Hall, who conducted a rival brothel in a new two-story structure that today stands vacant just east of Old Post Office. A 1903 map shows two more brothels operated by Jenny Duffy and housed in very modest one-story wood frame buildings just to the east of Fanny Hall's establishment. In 1906, city officials also shut these illegal businesses down.

A 1903 map shows a major change to the area between the brothels and the river. The livery stable and feed barn beside the river are gone and in their place stood Baker City Steam Laundry that had previously been housed in the Cleaver building across Bridge Street. The laundry building later housed Lew Brothers Tire Service before it moved to its present location on the east side of Powder River, today doing business as Les Schwab Tire Center.



*Lew Brothers tire shop on west side of Powder River.
This building burned and shop relocated across the river on Bridge St.*

On October 4, 1910, the newspaper headline read "Fire on Sunday Night Destroyed Old Land Mark." The fire took place in the 1600 block of Resort Street, located between Auburn and Bridge streets, which formed the east side of Post

Office Square. The landmark referred to was Christopher C. Cox's frame two-story lodging house at 1602 Resort on the southwest corner of that odd-shaped block. Also burned was a one-story frame Chinese chop suey restaurant in the middle of the block. That building had previously been a carpenter shop and then a second hand store. Miller Saloon, a two-story brick building located on the north end of the block, sustained damage but remained standing.

Chinese businessman Lee Chung constructed the Miller Saloon building in 1881 and operated it as a general merchandise store. At the time of the 1910 fire, the new Federal building, now called Old Post Office, was under construction. Plate glass and interior finish flooring for the Federal building were stored in the saloon. Those construction materials were a total loss causing several weeks' delay in completion of the new structure.

C. C. Cox's rooming house was called a landmark, because it was one of Baker City's oldest structures and had played an important role in the early life of the city. Constructed by Joseph W. Cleaver in about 1872, the building contained Cleaver's cabinet shop and undertaking business on the ground floor. On the second floor was a large room called Cleaver's Hall that was used for dances and by traveling drama companies. An old-timer remembered, "In the old building many of the most enjoyable dancing parties of early days were given. And there are residents of Baker County who remember 'Old Man' Getchell, the splendid violinist, who played for most of the dances of that time. The building stood on the site of the second structure every built in Baker, a tavern and stage station."



Baker Garage on east side of Old Post Office Square, ca. 1915. Saloon and Chinatown at left. Since 1917 the business is at 1740 Washington.

By 1914, Cox had replaced the two destroyed buildings with an automobile garage south of Miller Saloon, which he also owned. The new structure was about 55 feet wide with a fourteen-foot-wide entrance in the middle. A 1914

advertisement said that Cox and partner Pearson called their business Baker Garage and sold Overland-35 and Hudson-Six-40 automobiles.

Around 1915, Cox's garage business was bought by William R. Southard, a former Haines livery stable owner, and S. Oscar Correll, a Baker lawyer. The tall false front of the garage advertised in large, bold lettering: "**THE BAKER GARAGE. All kinds of Supplies and Repairing. Southard & Correll. Hudson Buick.**" Correll soon left the business. By 1917 Southard and Shinn had moved to 1780 Washington, where Baker Garage is still located under the ownership of partners Glen Daugherty and son, Randy Daugherty. The old Resort Street location became a Nash dealership.



Chinatown was on both sides of Auburn between Resort and Powder River. The Joss House (Chinese temple) with curved roof and flagpole are now the site of Baker City Police Department.

This tour around Old Post Office Square ends at the northeast corner of Resort and Auburn, the former location of Chinatown. At its zenith, as seen on a 1903 map, Baker City's Chinese ghetto, which existed from about 1870 to 1940, contained a total of 52 buildings, most of which were only eight-foot wide wooden shacks. On the north side of Auburn between Resort and Powder River, there were sixteen dwellings and three businesses sandwiched between a Joss religious temple at the east end of the block near Powder River and a two-story frame brothel at the west end, site of today's Clark Electric. The only brick structures, both two-story, were the Joss house and the Wing-Hing-Yuen store located on the east side of Resort north of today's Clark Electric.

Today nothing remains of Chinatown, and also gone are most of the other buildings that used to ring Old Post Office Square in the early days of our city's history.

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