

**COMMUNITY** Saturday, August 18, 2001

# Paper —

CONTINUED FROM THE COVER

The phone is always ringing. For decades there has been the same hum of quietly urgent bustle in the storefront offices of this hometown newspaper, but the sounds will change soon.

For the first time in the paper's 137-year history, it will be printed with an offset press using new computer technology. The massive Babcock Optimus letterpress, one of only seven remaining hot-type presses in the country and the only one on the East Coast, will be retired from weekly service in September, the McDaniels estimate.

It will be the end of an era. John McDaniel remembers when the Babcock first came to Sherburne in the mid-1960s. The press is estimated to be more than 70 years old. It was purchased from Congressman George Wortley, who first used it to publish the Syracuse University *Daily Orange* newspaper.

After delivery on a large flatbed truck, a carpenter had to tear down a wall in the downtown Sherburne storefront so the press could be pushed in on rollers. "It had found a home," remembers John McDaniel.

The Babcock allowed continuation of a printing process John McDaniel learned from his father, Harry J. McDaniel, who took over *The Sherburne News* in 1914 from his uncle, John H. O'Brien. O'Brien had in turn bought the paper in 1881, beginning what has turned out to be a family legacy of local journalism.

While John McDaniel was still in high school he learned to use the Linotype machine and sheet-fed printing press that, at the time, mirrored the way most of America got its news.

John McDaniel still sits at the Linotype machine, which nearly grazes the ceiling. A specialized keyboard allows him to type each word, starting with jangly taps and ending with a great heave and clatter as slugs of metal type are cast from liquid metal alloys and quickly cooled. Pages are laid out in galleys and carried to the letterpress, where a massive roller presses sheets of newsprint against the inky type.

"It gets heavier each time," said 80-year-old John McDaniel.

"It's time to change.

The technology is there," said his son Jim. "Back when they started (*The Sherburne News*) in 1864 they were using lit-



WAYNE HANSEN/Press & Sun-Bulletin

le handtype. They moved on to Linotype. If they were still printing with handtype, they wouldn't be here anymore. It's the same with this. You have to move on to the next generation of technology."

That technology has helped the McDaniels establish a thriving commercial printing business, where everything from books in seven languages to bank deposit receipts to piano string holders headed for New York City are produced. "The work is in the newspaper," commented John McDaniel, "but the profit is in the printing."

The Linotype machine will remain for occasional special printing needs, but scanners and offset presses will produce the newspaper. A local printer with newspaper capabilities is expected to print and fold the finished product, although the McDaniels anticipate buying additional machinery so that every part of the process can remain on the premises.

The future of the Babcock Optimus letterpress is not yet clear, however.

The Chenango County Historical Society hoped to buy it, but declined with regret. "We thought long and hard about it," said President Dale Storms, "but there's no place in our building for it. It's too big and needs a reinforced floor. I hope that perhaps the people of Sherburne will find a way to preserve it. No one wants it to go for scrap iron. That's too awful to think about."

Instead, the Chenango County Historical Society plans to write a grant to the Sherburne-based Howard Finch Foundation. The historical society would like to create a professionally prepared videotape describing an in-depth history of *The Sherburne News* and showing the press in operation before it ends its weekly service.

The foundation is a logical place to start. Before he died, the quietly wealthy Sherburne benefactor, Howard Finch, used to start every morning with a cup of coffee on a worn wooden bench beside the press, and a visit with the McDaniels.

Although the newspaper's format may change, the heartbeat of Sherburne will still be recorded in pages filled with news about area performances, sporting events, weddings, elections, and visits from an occasional dairy princess.

Life will change a bit for the McDaniels, too. There will be more time for commercial printing, and for John McDaniel's work as Sherburne's town clerk 6½ days a week. The annual McDaniels family hunting trips to South Dakota will be a little easier, and you might see Betty zipping through the county in her little convertible.

But will John McDaniel miss the Babcock? "I've been doing this since 1936. I've got to get used to it. We'll still be doing the newspaper; it'll just be a different method. I won't get tired of setting all that type anymore. We'll just scan it in."

## 2001 Sherburne Newspaper changes



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