

Los Angeles Times

OC Edition: 1968 and Beyond

By JACKSON SELLERS

Let's set the stage for the Orange County Edition in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. The newsroom, accommodating about 50 people, stretched from the windows facing Sunflower Avenue to about where the Editorial library now starts. The editor's office, occupied first by Ted Weegar, then by George Cotliar and Matt Goree, stood where the Art Department now stands. It was the newsroom's only private office. Nextdoor was the wire room with its teletype machines. The present-day editor's office served as the news conference room back then.

This was a 19th century newsroom with typewriters, glue pots, pica poles, pneumatic tubes and copy spikes. If a newspaperman resurrected from the 1880s had walked in, he would have felt pretty much at home. Our 20-year-old Underwoods would have looked cutting-edge. The phones would have been a marvelous improvement over telegrams. But the pneumatic tubes and the backshop's Linotypes would have been very familiar. Assuming he was a good newspaperman, he could have functioned quite well.

The first technological development, coming in the mid-1970s when we tossed out the Linotypes and began keypunch typesetting operations, would not have fazed him. After all, the change took place in the backshop, not the newsroom, which stayed exactly the same. And if he were a makeup editor, he would have quickly learned to appreciate veloxes in the composing room. Veloxes pasted on a page board beat the hell out of lead

type that had to be read upside down and backwards. He would say: *What will they think of next?*

The next advancement came in the early 1980s. It was the brown Coyote, the first computer at *The Times*, "magic boxes" as some cynics called them. How would our 19th century colleague have fared? Just about as well as our Editorial staff at the time, I say. Like them, he was smart and talented, and like them, he had never written anything except on a typewriter or a notepad.

In essence, the Coyote was just a typewriter that allowed easy corrections and editing — no No. 2 pencils needed — and my gosh, it also provided instant messaging and access to the wires. A training room was set up in what is now Jim Granelli's office. Writers got a week of training (an hour a day), content editors got two weeks and copy editors, who needed to be introduced to typesetting styles, got three weeks.

In the early 1980s, I was the OC slot, and I became sold on these "magic boxes" the first time I released a 40-inch story. Always before in my career (which already stretched back a quarter of a century), I had to give the back shop an hour or more of lead time on such a long story. This time, after I hit the release button, the story was coming out of the typesetter before I could even get to the composing room. And it didn't need proofing. *Bye bye, proof readers. Thanks, but we don't need you anymore.*

It was at this time, under Narda Zacchino and then Carol Stogsdill, that the edition grew rapidly. More physical space,

more desks and more offices were needed. Display Advertising was kicked out of what would become known as Editorial's North Wing. Classified's East Wing became ours. The old West Wing was expanded when Circulation's telemarketing operations were moved elsewhere. Editorial Systems got a home at that point. The Editorial staff rose to about 240.

Over a period of two decades, the Coyote computer system evolved and became ever better. Coyote PCs replaced the brown Coyote. Then Decade, software that emulated the Coyote, replaced the Coyote PC. More powerful mini-computers, the machines that work in the background and allow terminals to function, were installed in Orange County,

Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.

Just about the time everything was perfect in the Coyote/Decade system, we got CCI. It was inevitable. The old system was perfect for writers and content editors, but it was seriously lacking for copy, news and design editors. CCI provided what was needed — pagination, which allowed Editorial to put together not only stories but pages. *Bye bye, composing room folks. Thanks, but we don't need you anymore.* Not incidentally, the O.C. Editorial staff shrank in the early 21st century to about what it was 30 years before.

The *Los Angeles Times* won't need another computer system for perhaps 20 years. Let's see, I'll be 92 years old by then, long retired, and I won't give a damn.

The Bosses — Weegar to Kipling

With Commentary by Jackson Sellers

Ted Weegar 1968-1970: Ted was witty and intelligent — I liked him — but, downtown if not here, he was roundly hated. Editors often hate those who dictate their work schedules.

George Cotliar 1970-1972: Even as a *Times* paper boy, George wanted to be managing editor of the newspaper. Eventually, after leaving O.C., he achieved his boyhood ambition.

Matt Goree 1972-1983: Matt had a long reign, but Noel Greenwood didn't like him, maybe even feared him, so he was ousted to make room for Noel's pet, Narda Zacchino.

Narda Zacchino 1983-1990: She was a Board of Directors darling. Under Narda, the newsroom and staff grew rapidly. The edition entered what can be called its heyday.

Carol Stogsdill 1990-1993: Up like a rocket under Shelby Coffey, down like a bomb when Michael Parks took over. At a certain angle, in a certain light, she was beautiful.

Martin Baron 1993-1996: When Bob Magnuson jumped over him to become O.C. president, Marty skedaddled to the NYT and went on to greater things in Miami and Boston.

Bill Nottingham 1996-1998: Nobody else wanted the job, so Bill took it.

Lennie LaGuire 1998-2002: Lennie flared for a while, then came Tribune. *There be dragons here*, or at least bottom-line MBAs.

Richard Kipling 2002-Present: An edition sinks to a bureau, with Richard in charge.*

Orange County Editors: Some Like 'em Not

Managing Editors:

Bob Magnuson
Carol Stogsdill
Pat McMahon
Betty Liddick
Topy Fiske
John Arthur
Bill Nottingham
Mike Young
Rosemary McClure

News Editors:

Burt Folkart
Dave Galloway
Jon Markman
George Foulsham
Lynn Meersman
Pete Harrigan
Paul Loop
Kymberly Dryer
Doug List
Mike Kirkendall
Glenn Doggrell
Kendal Pate
Dave Campbell
Keith Thursby
Mark Yemma

Editor's Secretaries:

Bebe del Rio
Kay Eadie
Stella Wegener

City Editors:

Bud Anderson
Matt Goree
Mark Murphy
Don Thornton
Don Lipman/Don Smith
Bill Billiter
Dick Barnes
Sharon Rosenhause
Wes Hughes
Bob Magnuson
John Arthur
Pat McMahon
Bill Nottingham
Randy Hagihara
Jeff Brazil
Kris Lindgren
Jack Robinson

Slots:

Nick Williams, Jr.
Dave Galloway
Jackson Sellers
Gene Beauchamp
Steve Devol
Laura Nott
Tracy Boucher
Brad Bonhall

Chief Editorial Writers:

Don Angel
Steve Burgard

Business Editors:

Debbie Whitefield
Vicky McCargar
Bob Magnuson
Fred Muir
Warren Vieth
Don Nauss
Greg Griggs
Mike Young
Russ Stanton
Don Lee

Sports Editors:

Marshall Klein
John Cherwa
Herb Stutz
Craig Stanke
Keith Thursby
Mike Hisermann

Art Directors:

Russ Arasmith
Brian Steffens
Lily Dow
Juan Thomassie
Kris Onuigbo
Tia Lai

L.A. Liaison Editors:

Art Wild
Pat Benson
Joanna Raebel
Keith Harmon
Cheryl Brownstein-Santiago

Feature Editors:

Mary Lou Hopkins
Shearlean Duke
Sherry Angel
Carol Powers
Betty Liddick
Cece Vandervoort
Mike Young
Joan Springhetti
Kris Lindgren
Greta Beigel
Tony Lioce
Pamm Higgins
Anne Valdespino

Photo Chiefs:

Maxime Reams
Cliff Otto
Don Kelsen
Bob Lachman
Marty Steffens
Brian Steffens
Colin Crawford
Mary Cooney

System Managers:

Jackson Sellers
Jim Marchant
Terry Anderson
Gary Ambrose
Tony Cruse
Will James

Memories: Newspaper in a Bean Field

From JOHN WEYLER:

Just Gimme the Night

(Recollections of the Big Orange Machine in the '60s and '70s)

A bit of background: In 1968, the job of the night copy boy in Los Angeles — “editorial assistants” hadn’t been invented — was to sit in a room together waiting for a bell to ring. When it was your turn, you got to sharpen someone’s pencils or fill their glue pot ... seriously. In the newly opened Orange County edition, the job of the only night copy boy — me — was making cop calls, making a daily run to the Santa Ana courthouse to pick up copy (fax machines were too slow and unreliable), making food runs that usually included at least two stops (and everyone wanted exactly the right change), writing shorts for metro, running errands for editors (I bought kid’s baseball shoes, ping pong balls, greeting cards, food for parties, etc.), going to the backshop to get pages out (which meant learning to read Linotype lines upside down and mirror backwards), taking slot Dave Galloway’s kid to herpetology club meetings (more on that later), copy editing and headline writing, even laying out sports pages.

There were about six or seven of us working at night, in the northwest corner of the newsroom where the graphic artists are now. I was very fortunate to be working in O.C. Within four years, I was promoted to sportswriter. There’s no doubt those early experiences jump-started my career. (That, and the fact Ted Weegar opted not to fire me for calling a security guard a “door monitor.”)

Some Aspects of the Job Haven’t Changed ...

My first week on the job, I had to drive to Garden Grove and pick up a photo of a guy who had been chewed up and spit out by a farm machine while visiting his dad in the Midwest. I was 18. His mom opened the door, looked at me and sobbed, “You’re the same age as Billy.” She held me so tight I couldn’t breathe ... or maybe it was because I was bawling, too. I drove back to the office wondering if I should have joined the Navy and become a fighter pilot like I’d always dreamed. Good thing I didn’t. I traveled hundreds of thousands of miles as a sportswriter and bitched about every airport, hotel and cab. Oh, well, I could have been staying in the Hanoi Hilton.

Reptiles and Other Slimy Characters ...

So I'm driving Galloway's kid back to the office from the snake club and we arrive to discover one of his hobbies has escaped in my van. We couldn't find it anywhere. The next day, my girlfriend thought I had played a very cruel trick when she jumped into the van and almost sat on our four-foot hitchhiker.

We'd go for Chinese food once a week and one of the items we'd get was called "Beef Chow Yuk." Sports editor Marshall Klein was always first in line and news editor Burt Folkart used to say, "Marshall got the beef, we got the yuk." We had just installed our first Xerox machine that reduced the size of copies. So I typed a special message, reduced it, cut it to size, then removed and replaced the fortune in a cookie. I made certain Marshall got it. His reaction was priceless. He read it and screamed, "This isn't funny ... I could sue them for this." He was genuinely pissed. His fortune read: "You Will Soon Die."

I was editing a food story about a recipe for cooking fresh fish and wrote the head: "Treat Your Husband's Fish Right; Stuff It." Nick Williams Jr. was the slot that night and said, "Cute, John. But you know, maybe we can save it." The head that ran in the paper: "Treat Your Husband's Catch Right; Stuff It."

In the Days Before Computer Solitaire ...

The early fax machines used rolls of paper that were damp with a chemical and sealed in plastic. If you wadded the paper up just right, used a little tape, got a packing tube, well, you had yourself a baseball game. Marshall threw a wicked breaking ball to me one night and I did what any savvy hitter would do: went with the pitch, slamming a line drive to right field. "Right field" turned out to be the back of the head of Gene Beauchamp, who was trying to edit a late-breaking B1 story. Fax ball was curtailed for a while — especially close to deadline — and then the field was revised in an attempt to keep from killing the copy desk. The night newsroom's national pastime suffered a fatal blow a few months later when Marshall hit a shot off the big clock on the back wall. The clock, once perched 25 feet up, exploded impressively when it hit the floor, showering half the copy desk in debris.

Other, usually less violent, sports took over, including Frisbee relay. You

could still play this one today if you had the *huevos*. Station four people on each corner of the hallways that run around Photo and the bathrooms and see how many complete revolutions you can make without touching a wall or dropping the disc. The record is thirty-something.

Hey, it wasn't all fun and games. Folkart was imitating Laker Dick Barnett — who used to sort of kick himself in the butt with his heels while shooting — during a fax-ball basketball game one night when he felt a twinge in his neck. His fingers started going numb over the next few days and a week later he had major neck surgery at St. Joe's. He was on the injured reserve and out of action for months.

Big Fun in The OC ...

What are the chances the cops would storm a Times-sponsored office party these days? Galloway was so toasted he actually took a bite out of the brim of someone's cowboy hat, before falling into the rose bushes and requiring a rescue party of several. A blotto society writer suddenly became fond of fondling me, which thoroughly amused the gathered masses, with the exception of my girlfriend (who asked if I'd get fired if she punched her lights out) and the woman's poor husband. (I'm sure I was very offended, but sexual harassment wasn't a big topic back then.) Tables of food were tipped over, you could smell marijuana on the side of the house and host Tom Fortune, for some reason, was up on his roof screaming incoherently when the police arrived.

Steve Emmons made a "Big Orange Machine" movie every year. We all had our little parts and scenes, but we never saw the whole thing until the annual party. My favorite scene was sportswriter Dave Distel — whose record I surpassed for fewest days showing up in the office in a career — disguised in a trench coat, hat pulled low, backing down the hallway to Kay Edie's desk, where he reached behind his back and picked up his paycheck.

And there was the time the pneumatic tubes ate a David Shaw story. Ralph Young was working the slot in the early days. He often did his final read while standing in front of the tubes. Suddenly Shaw's 40-foot-long piece was sucked up by the tubes. Mechanics had to tear the tubes apart to get it out.

As good ol' days go, these were pretty freakin' good.

From TIM WILSON:

City editor Mark Murphy used to keep a football in his desk which he would bring out from time to time and pass around the office. It sort of kept the stress level from becoming too high. One day some New York Times executives were being shown around the Orange County plant and just as they were passing by the Editorial office a football bounced off the wall. The person giving the tour simply said, "That's the newsroom," and continued on down the hall toward another department.

Years ago, before smoking was prohibited in the workplace, there were frequently several cigars going along with the usual cigarettes, in a newsroom about the size of the former calendar/sports side of the present Editorial office. Then came the new smoking policy stating there had to be designated nonsmoking areas in the newsroom. So the office was divided up into smoking and nonsmoking pods, all in the same room. The ultimate absurdity occurred in the copy desk area where one six-desk pod was divided in half with three desks at one end of the pod designated as a smoke-free area and three at the other end for smokers.

Gordon Grant used to keep a humidor filled with pipe tobacco on his desk. Sportswriter Dave Distel, who also smoked a pipe, would frequently walk over to Grant's desk and fill his pipe with tobacco. One day Grant was out at Lion Country Safari, a local wild animal park, and while he was walking around the grounds, he spotted a dried rhinoceros patty on the ground. Grant took the fecal material, broke it up and put in the humidor. Sure enough Distel stopped by Grant's desk and filled his pipe. He lit it up and smoked it. It was hard to tell if Distel knew something was amiss because the pipe tasted so bad or because everyone was laughing at him.

Probably the oddest thing to happen in the newsroom was the staff beauty contest in the early '70s. This was open to any woman on the staff. Only two women entered, a night copy messenger, Cindy Fink, and the librarian, Rosemary Eadie (the daughter-in-law of the secretary, Kay Eadie). The two women stood in front of the city desk. The men on the staff made their judgments. Rosemary won by one vote and went on to represent the Times in the Orange County Press Club Beauty Pageant. She took first place, clearly a proud day in the history of the Times Orange County Edition.

Another odd thing to think back on was the announcement that women on the staff would be permitted to wear pantsuits. Prior to this announcement women were not permitted to wear pants to work. This was not to mean the Times was approving women wearing pants to work, just pantsuits. There were displays set up in the coffee room down the hall from the newsroom depicting acceptable pantsuits. Suits with pants and a matching coat. A coat which one woman described as being long enough to cover everything, fore and aft. It didn't take long for women to go from wearing pantsuits to wearing pants.

[A note to Jackson:] Well, I hope this helps. And good luck on your retirement!!! It was great working with you. I owe you a lot. You got me into the computer end of things and that was the part of my job I liked the most.

From HOWARD VOELTZ, retired OC plant manager:

For almost a hundred years, very little changed in the way the newspaper was composed and printed. The first mechanical Linotype came to The Times in 1893. It wasn't until the 1970s that it became clear that electronics would surely take over, and it took another decade to pull the whole thing together. The last hot metal page was set December 29, 1974. Thereafter, the Production department set type on electronic machines, while Editorial was still working on typewriters. When Editorial got its News Editing System in 1982, we became electronic from front to back, although there was still a lot to do.

The first Times Electronics Group was organized in 1970. The "Original Six" consisted of Joe Malcor (an electrician leadman) who lead the group, me (an apprentice engraver), Ron Kalpakoff (an apprentice electrician), Claud Cleary (an electrician), Harold Hogan (a composing machinist) and Charlie Shaw (an Ad Row compositor). It would be quite an exciting time for all of us. Little did we know where it would all lead.

You and I, Jackson, along with Jim Robertson, Tom Kuby, Joe Malcor, Gordon Andersen and all the rest, were lucky enough to be involved in the first major production evolution in the newspaper industry since the Linotype was invented. It was a grand adventure, and there aren't too many left in the business who saw both worlds.

From JACKSON SELLERS:

We invented the word “Orafy” to describe the process of getting an Orange County angle into a story prepared by Los Angeles. It’s easy now. Modify the story on a computer terminal, and away it goes. But think back 30 years ago, when we still had Linotypes in the composing room. On Page 10 of tomorrow’s newspaper, there is a story that must be Orafied — just that story, the rest of the page can be picked up for the Orange County edition. A truck brings down page mats from Los Angeles. Most of the mats will be used as-is to produce curved lead plates for the rotary presses. But Page 10, requiring Orafication, must be handled differently. First, a thick FLAT plate is cast. The offending story is sawed out, and the plate is slid onto a so-called “turtle,” a steel table on rollers. Now lines of type from a Linotype can be wedged into the sawed-out hole. A makeup editor, proof-reading the hot type upside down and backwards, signs off on the page. A new page mat must be made, so that a curved plate for the presses can be fashioned. This was the way it was done until 1974, when The Times finally “got the lead out.”

From JIM MARCHANT:

I joined the Editorial Systems staff of the Orange County Edition in January of 1988. At that time, the newsroom space was expanding into the west wing on the main-entrance side. For the first several weeks, I crowded in with Jackson Sellers in an office next to the mailboxes, but existed as a transient because a move was imminent.

Work was in progress and furniture was arriving daily in that wing. After two weeks or less, things looked ready, but no official go-ahead had been issued. With a wink from Jackson, I started lugging stuff over to the new Systems office at the far end of that wing, eventually borrowing carts for the heavier stuff. We thus moved ourselves for the most part, although I disremember whether we got in ahead of the phone hookup and Coyote cabling, or later.

The Sports staff was our original neighbor. Herb Stutz situated his desk close to our doors. Later Glenna McKie was added to the staff as a second administrative assistant (joining the perpetual Stella Wegener) with extensive Sports duties. Herb and Glenna got especially good technical support as Jackson and I were only three steps away.

Not much further down, columnist Herb Vida set up camp. He was a fre-

quent lunch partner of Jackson's, so the two of them and I were often a threesome at the Times cafeteria. We always sat on the patio to accommodate Jackson's smoking. Inevitably, as soon as we were settled, the wind would shift to bathe Herb and I — both non-smokers — in Jackson's fumes. We would bask in the sun — a treat, especially in my initial months, which had been the depth of chilly winter for this Iowa immigrant. We would gaze across the barren field, which seemed to sit in a plowed and cultivated state for 10 months of the year. On the far side was the farm that fronts on Fairview. The added north-south street (Susan) and the AAA building had not arrived. Often, we would be entertained by railcars gliding in with loads of newsprint.

The field was supposed to be for lima beans, and I heard about “the bean fields of Orange County” early and often. Of course, this frequently included a reference to the “lima bean sculpture” over near the Performing Arts complex, for which some alleged artiste received an unconscionable fee for what amounted to a pile of boulders.

This was the first time Jackson had a partner. Previously he had been by himself, although he had cultivated a number of system specialists to deal with simpler problems and also to be a source of technical help at the several bureaus supported by Orange County. Soon after I arrived a number of trips were arranged so I could get a first-hand look at these sites, which included San Juan Capistrano (I was confused at references to "San Juan." I thought, "Puerto Rico?!" I had to get used to the "Capistrano" being dropped), Vista, Santa Ana . . . [I can't remember them all]. Greg Beckmann, San Diego News Bureau editor, was the specialist designated at that location.

Jackson assigned me to be Greg's and San Diego's contact point in Costa Mesa, and I was regularly delegated there to set up and nursemaid election operations for their edition and capture electronic results from the San Diego Registrar of Voters. Every registrar does things differently, but in San Diego, they had a long history of supplying data to their local news outlets, both print and broadcast, so my setup work was easier because I just had to adapt to their existing output. Orange County, with no major media of its own to cater to, took a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. Data was sent to the Secretary of State in Sacramento, but O.C. courthouse hangers-on were provided with printouts, elaborately designed so that when they were printed on a left-to-right printer, tables appeared in column format. The only medium that cared about a computer data feed was the Times. Jackson had to get complicated programs written that essentially dismantled the left-to-right columns and reassembled them into a single on-screen column for typesetting.

Some years later the Register decided that they should start using 20th Century, computer-to-computer election tables. They asked for, and got help from, O.C. Editorial Systems in understanding the O.C. data and dealing with the outside consultant used by the O.C. registrar to design the county computer output. The bureaus in those days (excepting San Diego) were equipped with IBM PC-XT desktop computers, modems and phone lines. They wrote using a DOS program, "PC-Write," and transmitted at 300BPS using "LA-Talk" to dial the modems. "LA-Talk" was a knockoff of a shareware program, "PC-Talk," customized by Editorial Technical Resources. That department was located in L.A. and was separate from Editorial Systems. It was comprised of Dick O'Reilly, Dick Emerson and Bart Everett. Their group came into existence at a time when Editorial Systems turned down requests to get involved with new-fangled desktop PCs, then in their infancy, because Editorial Systems had its hands full with just the Coyote system.

There were a lot of shipments of equipment to unpack during my time in Orange County. Bureaus kept expanding, so there were more IBM XTs coming in. Laptops were starting to get useful, and people began clamoring for them, so those needed to be unpacked, configured and learned. Often, O.C. would establish its own customizations, which could rankle the Editorial Systems folks in L.A. But, Jackson would argue, it doesn't make sense for O.C. writers to see a modem menu of several pages, with the first pages listing L.A. phone numbers, when the writers always dialed O.C. phone numbers. So we put O.C. numbers on the first page.

PCs and PC-based laptops were cheaper, wore out faster and were surpassed by new models frequently, so there also were replacements to be unpacked, configured, learned and installed. The Orange County newsroom continued to expand and the east wing, which had been occupied by Classified, was starting to be coveted by Editorial. Coyote-system newspapers had been asking for alternatives to the brown Coyote terminals for a while, and about this time System Integrators began offering the "PC Coyote," which was the Coyote terminal reduced to a circuit card that fit inside an IBM PC. "Coyote on a stick," we called it. The Times embraced the idea wholeheartedly, so yet more PCs arrived.

As the expansion into the east wing got under way, Jackson again lobbied for more help. The prospects were promising, but what about seating space? The systems office did not occupy the whole back wall. On the west side there was columnist Dana Parson's office. On the far east side, down a narrow corridor lined with storage cabinets, was a small "interview room." It had been, for nearly all its existence, a repository of dusty bundles of the 1989 Progress Edition and the like.

It was there at all, I was told, because a bigwig in L.A. involved in the remodeling had decided that Editorial Systems could not have it because it was more space than protocol allowed or pecking order deserved. Apparently, it was better to carve out a worthless, out-of-the-way room than to be practical. [The “bigwig” was Noel Greenwood. I tell it like it is. — Jackson Sellers.] But with a pending staff expansion to three looming, more sensible heads prevailed and the wall was knocked down, making a space for Terry Anderson, who migrated down from the L.A. Editorial Systems staff.

Those oddballs, photographers and artists, looked skeptically at IBM-compatibles. They had been fiddling with Macintoshes — “Tinkertoy computers,” SE models originally — and liked them. If Editorial Systems was wary of PCs at first, they nearly shunned Macintoshes outright. I had a little exposure to Macs and a lot of interest, so I began finding excuses to visit the artists and poke around on them. I discovered a closet packed to the ceiling with manuals, floppy disks, warranty cards and assorted parts. I undertook an organizing effort and was able to sort out what was there, as well as be nearby when questions arose. Since their location was about as far as you could physically get from Editorial Systems, it was a welcome change in technical help for them. When the first Mac II models arrived, and real networking and file servers came into the picture, there were more boxes to unpack, systems to learn and configurations to design.

After several years, Terry Anderson was bitten by the Internet bug. When the Times put out a call for people interested in joining the Prodigy joint venture — the genesis of today’s Times Interactive — Terry and Jeff Perlman of the O.C. Editorial staff volunteered and were accepted, so O.C. Editorial Systems had an opening.

Gary Ambrose was a freelance photographer who was very Mac proficient, and became a go-to guy when other photogs ran into problems. In those days, many freelancers practically resided in the newsroom, and Gary liked to hang around the system office and talk tech stuff. He seemed like a person with interest and aptitude. Also, Gary liked the idea of becoming full-time. Although he was doubtful of his technical prowess and his ability to learn about the Coyote/Decade system and IBM-compatibles, he was convinced that he could fit right in with us techies, so when invited to join the group, he agreed. His doubts were unfounded.

As the Times churned through the 1990s, other changes began to unfold. In L.A., some of the people who had pioneered electronic editing at the Times were moving about and moving on. At that time Editorial Systems was a news department, with close ties to some teams on the computer technology staff that were largely dedicated to the higher operation and maintenance needs of the editorial

equipment.

But the true computer department was becoming uneasy at the proliferation of technical groups being created inside other major Times departments, and eventually its director, Keating Rhodes, made a persuasive case that all such services and staff belonged under his wing. Editorial Systems staff in Los Angeles, Orange County and Washington, D.C., found out that they were to become members of the computer staff. Most of them had journalism degrees, editorial backgrounds and semi-official titles with “editor” in them.

Nevertheless, the merger was carried out. More scattering occurred, and I left the Orange County Edition in 1996 to join a newly consolidated, all-Times, IT Help Desk in Los Angeles. Gary Ambrose followed the same path a short time later.

For a time, Editorial Systems ceased to exist on paper, although the Orange County Office continued with its remaining staff. After a while, Editorial Systems was reinstated as an Information Technology department, where it continues in L.A. today, with outposts in Orange County and Washington, D.C.

From J. MICHAEL KENNEDY:

Don Thornton arrived at the Orange County edition in the summer of 1978 as the new city editor. He immediately injected a spirit of fun in the newsroom, while making his home in Newport Beach a party headquarters for his young and talented staff — many of whom went on to become some of the top editors of the Times. He drove an aging Ford station wagon affectionately known as “The Goat” and only occasionally employed the services of a barber. But he had a keen eye for news, as well as the talent to find the right reporter for the task.

Thornton was later transferred to the downtown office, where he was an editor on the political desk in the 1980 campaign. From there, he became the managing editor of the Hartford Courant before moving on to the San Francisco Examiner. For the last decade, he has been a private investigator for a prominent San Francisco law firm.

From ANONYMOUS:

All right, if you're going to be a sourpuss about it, but I don't want any credit for it.

Carol Stogsdill was known for her toe-to-toe phone battles with the powers-that-be downtown. Usually, the issue was whether an O.C. story was good enough for A1. Carol usually said yes; sometimes downtown would say no. If Carol was convinced she was right, she'd be on the horn, most often with George Cotliar.

A not uncommon sight would be that of Carol bolting from her office, heading straight for Jackson Sellers' office. That was the result of her trying to multi-task; namely, arguing with Cotliar while trying to communicate on other matters with her city desk. On those days when her multi-tasking proved too much, she realized after three or four exchanges that she had mistakenly sent a pointed message meant for George to the entire OC staff instead. Thus, Jackson would be called upon to quickly and quietly spike the message from everyone's Decade basket. On the city desk, however, that would set off a scramble to read the message before it got 86ed.

From JACKSON SELLERS:

When I was young and ambitious, say 30 years ago, I pledged to teach The Times the correct way to use the adverb "awhile." In the newspaper, I often saw sentences such as "It takes awhile" and "He ran for awhile." Sometimes these syntax errors would show up in 30-point headline type! I even devised a formula — "Awhile = For a while" — which, if applied by the copy desks, would eliminate those mistakes forever. "It takes for a while" and "He ran for for a while" could not possibly be seen as correct. About 10 years ago, a miserable failure, I gave up. Today the adverb still reigns as the most frequent syntax error in the paper. To hell with it, I'm going fishing, figuratively speaking. Like a savage, I eat raw fish with gusto, as an adopted Japanese like me should, but I don't kill them.

This Orange County edition history, initially put together in January 2004, is open-ended, meaning items can be added as long as anyone cares to do so. Since I am retiring, I have placed this master Quark for Windows file in the good hands of Will James in OC Editorial Systems. He will update it or modify it as required. When anyone wants a copy, Will can print it out or convert it to an Acrobat PDF file that can be read on all of your terminals.

Jackson Sellers



Farewell From Jackson: I don't mean to hog this history of the Orange County edition, although it's easy to do since I'm putting it together. In the grand scheme of things, I was not important. I rose only to copy desk supervisor in the 1970s and then to systems editor/manager in the 1980s when computers came along. Now, in 2004, I am retiring without having achieved much. But I can't resist calling attention to perhaps my proudest moment at The Times. In the photo above, at a company picnic, I am waving to the camera as my ever-present cigarette spews its plume. But notice the t-shirt. "The Jackson Sellers Band" was performing that day, as it did during that year or so at the Orange County Press Club banquet, a great Halloween party and several other places, both public and private. Mike Young organized the band. Members included Michael Flagg, Randy Lewis, Mary Lou Fulton, Kris Lindgren, Jim Gomez, David Puckett and Chris Woodyard. I had nothing to do with anything. I played no instrument, couldn't sing and possessed a tin ear. The day I learned about this, I went home and told my wife Yoshi about it: "Guess what? There is a newsroom band named after me. They simply like my name." Yoshi, perhaps wiser than I am, replied: "There's more to it than that. They like you, too."

From Jackson Sellers:

In the '60s, '70s and early '80s, ashtrays were everywhere in the newsroom. Disgusting things, never cleaned, just emptied.

Trash baskets often smoldered until cold coffee was dumped into them. Then the cries of long-suffering non-smokers began to be heard. A pregnant Marcida Dodson was the no-smoking ringleader in Orange County. First there were no-smoking pods. Then smoking was banned completely in the newsroom but still allowed in private Editorial offices such as mine. You could ban a bad habit but you couldn't

eradicate it. Some writers wrote better, or thought they did, if cigarettes were burning up in ashtrays as they pounded their keyboards. I began receiving messages in early evenings, as deadlines approached: "Jackson, isn't it time you went home?" They wanted to write and smoke at my terminal.

Finally, in mid-1987, smoking was banned even in private offices. I couldn't let this landmark event pass without some sort of recognition. At the time, I was smoking a wimpy brand, so I stopped at a liquor store and bought a pack of potent Camels, then drove to the Orange County plant shortly before midnight. I lit up and stubbed out the last official newsroom cigarette. And I wrote a commemorative paragraph that Platemaking formalized in a terrarium donated by Maria LaGanga:



Here lies Orange County Editorial's last official cigarette. It flared to life at 11:59 p.m. June 30, 1987, and died precisely at midnight, under sentence by the

Publisher. Traces of silver-blue smoke lingered, then faded away like a journalistic tradition – gone forever, like typewriters, copy books, glue pots, hot type and turtles.

The trophy sat in my office for more than 16 years. When I retired in January 2004, I took it home with me. Nobody else wanted it.

From Jackson Sellers:

In the very early '80s, when it became clear that our typewriters were doomed, O.C. Editor Matt Goree sent John Cherwa, Steve Emmons and me to Los Angeles to find out what this was all about. We were introduced to the not-yet-implemented Coyote computer system. John was interested enough but had Sports duties that kept him from getting deeply involved. Steve, after taking a look, wanted nothing to do with it, and even refused to accept a Coyote terminal for a couple of months. When he finally came around, he developed into one of the most computer-savvy writers in the newsroom. I, on the other hand, saw the computer system as the greatest thing since sliced bread. This hoary “sliced bread” cliché is historically appropriate, I think. Commercial sliced bread probably came along about the same time that typewriters entered newsrooms throughout the nation in the late 19th century. Anyway, I stuck with it and served about 23 years as the Orange County systems editor/manager.

At several retirement gatherings in the last week of January 2004, I mentioned Alex Raksin's Coyote/Decade piece in the current issue of “Among Ourselves.” The article implied that I was more important in developing the Decade system than I really was. After receiving an early draft of the article, I attempted to straighten out Alex so that he would put emphasis on the people who actually did the job. I even suggested to this Pulitzer Prize winner that my Decade and VPN manuals, highly successful and somewhat amusing, had misled him into thinking I was a guiding light in the world of computer systems, instead of just the reporter I was.

Alex ignored me and went to press with what he had written, then sent me the following:

“Just wanted to put it on record that you were actually much more self-effacing in our discussions than I let on in my Among Ourselves piece. You did go on at length, for example, to explain how Wayne Parrack, Wil Locke, Dick O'Reilly, Bart Everett and others helped open your mail, offer refreshments and otherwise provide invaluable support as you single-handedly invented the Coyote and Decade systems. Congrats on that lonely but important achievement, and cheers. Alex Raksin”

I laughed, and faded away smiling.