Leo Adler (1895-1993)

Leo Adler was an innovative seller of newspapers and magazines, a self-made millionaire**,** and a strong advocate first of Baker and then Baker City, Oregon (the town changed its name in 1989). His work and enthusiasm may have its strongest impact on Oregon through the work of the Leo Adler Trust.

Adler's father, Carl (1854-1918), immigrated to America from Germany in 1871 and made his way to Oregon in 1874. In 1883, he married Salem-born Laura Hirsch (1864-1933), the oldest daughter of a prominent German Jewish family. Carl Adler was the proprietor of the Crystal Palace, which sold stationery and books in Astoria. In 1888, the family and the store moved to Baker, where Leo was born in June 1895. He was the youngest of three children.

Leo Adler began selling newspapers and magazines on a Baker street at the age of nine. By 1925, his territory for magazine and newspaper distribution ranged from The Dalles to Grand Island, Nebraska. In time, he had two thousand outlets in seven states and sold more than three million magazines a year.

A town booster, Adler was known around the state as "Mr. Baker" by the time he was forty years old. For six decades, from the 1920s to the 1980s, he worked tirelessly to bring press attention, investment, and tourism to the city he loved. He had a special fondness for the local fire department and for many years contributed funds for the purchase of fire trucks and ambulances. A lifelong baseball enthusiast, he gave charitable gifts to begin the renovation of city baseball facilities so that Catholic school students (who could not use public school facilities) had regulation fields for their games.

Adler never married and lived frugally in the family home, which is now a museum. He sold his business in 1977 on the condition that it would remain in Baker for five years. At his death, on November 2, 1993, he left $20 million in the Leo Adler Trust, which supports a community fund and a scholarship program for graduates of Baker County high schools and North Powder High School. From 1995 to 2008, the fund supported aboutf 400 students a year with the average amount of $2,433 each.

Written by Adair Law

Further Reading:

Collections on the Adler family are held by the Leo Adler House Museum, Baker, and the Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland.

For information on the Leo Adler Trust, see www.leoadler.com.

Law, Adair. *The Spark and the Light: The Leo Adler Story*. Boise, Idaho: Leo Adler Trust, 2004.

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