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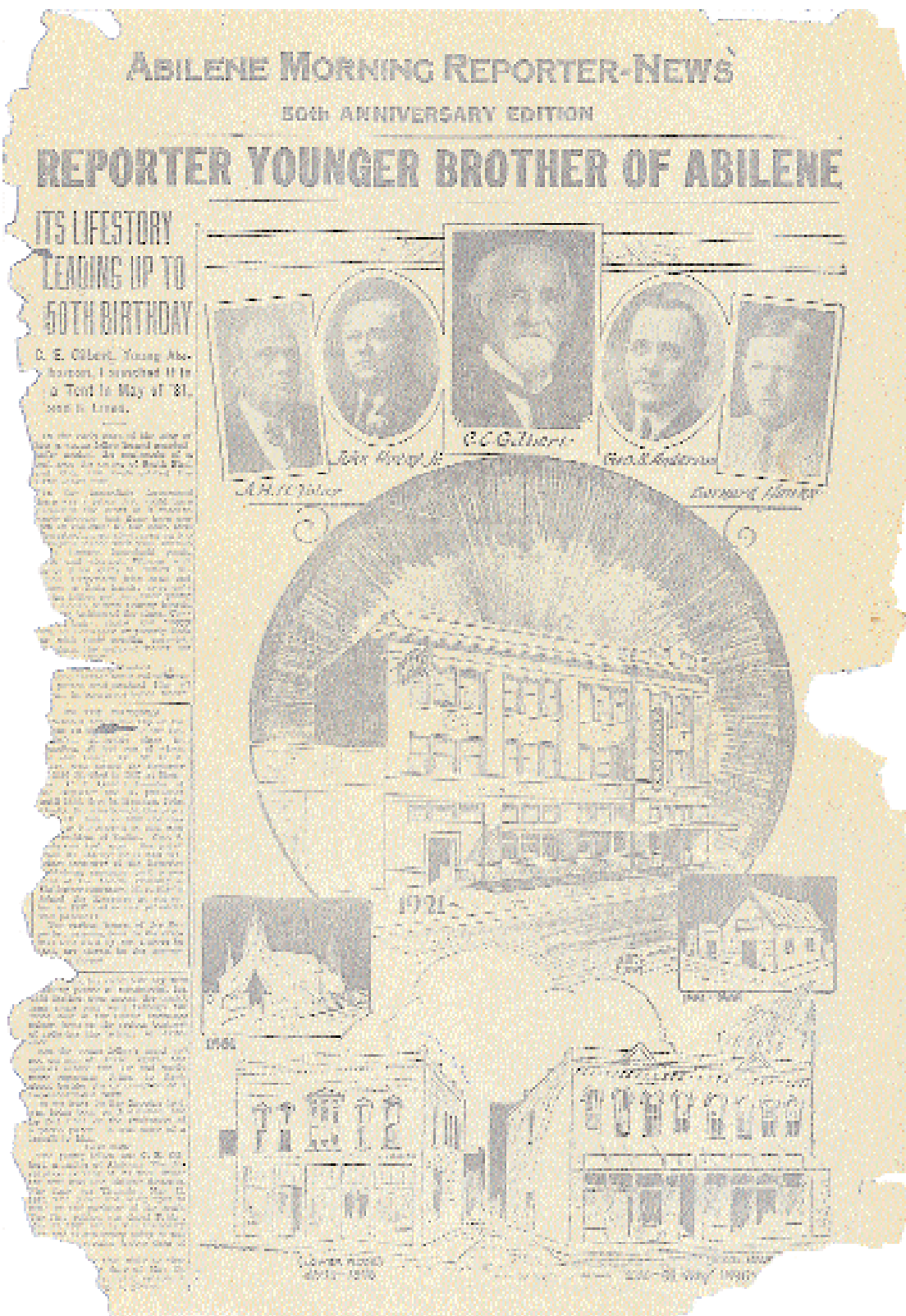
In the early 1970s, AR-N pressmen work on a Linotype machine.

The Abilene Reporter-News celebrates

120 years

To commemorate the 120th birthday today of the *Abilene Reporter-News*, we present 120 brief sketches, anecdotes, quotes and facts from the newspaper's history, so closely intertwined with the history of Abilene itself.

- 1. Oldest business**
The *Abilene Reporter-News* is the city's oldest business institution, founded just three months after the town itself.
- 2. Twins**
"Through the years the *Abilene Reporter-News* has had as its policy the building up of Abilene and its trade area. It has ever served as investigator, critic, guide. It has helped to establish the moral tone of the town, as well as to stimulate its material growth."
"To know the story of the development of Abilene and its trade area is to know the history of the *Abilene Reporter-News*. The two are inseparable, for almost they are twins; and the one has been dependent on the other."
— Naomi H. Kincaid in her master's thesis at Hardin-Simmons University in 1945.
- 3. Father of the paper**
In 1881, 25-year-old Charles Edwin Gilbert came to Abilene from Navasota, where he had already been publishing a newspaper for nearly five years. He bought the printing equipment from a short-lived publication in Buffalo Gap, *The Texas Eagle*, and moved it to Abilene.
- 4. Published in a tent**
On June 17, 1881, Gilbert published the first edition of the *Abilene Reporter* from a tent at South First and Oak.
- 5. Fire!**
The newspaper was only two months old and had just moved into its new building when fire destroyed all the buildings on the block between Oak and Chestnut on South First.
Gilbert, suffering from typhoid fever, got out of bed and published a single sheet extra edition from the shop of the Baird newspaper on Aug. 27, 1881.
"Great Fire in Abilene," the headline read. "One Fourth of the the Town Lain in Ashes — Loss Over \$20,000!"
- 6. Rising from the ashes**
In his extra edition about the disastrous fire, C.E. Gilbert wrote of his own loss:
"All that constituted the paraphernal appertunances of the *Abilene Reporter* office on yesterday, is today a heap of smouldering ashes, twisted irons and masses of melted type metal. But tomorrow she will, Phoenix-like, rise from the ashes, clad in bright, new garments, and resume her career of usefulness."
- 7. Wall paper**
Early-day Abilenians found a practical use for the *Reporter*. Besides reading it, they papered their walls with it.
"This way," wrote Katharyn Duff in *Catclaw Country*, "children could learn to read from the wall while the paper served as insulation from the summer dust and winter wind which seeped into the hastily constructed dwellings."



- 8. Why not call it Anson?**
C. E. Gilbert claimed credit for naming the town of Anson. He suggested in an editorial that the seat of Jones County also be named for Anson Jones, the former president of the Republic of Texas. And it was.
- 9. Moving the county seat**
One of the first controversies involving the *Reporter* was moving the county seat of Taylor County from Buffalo Gap to Abilene. C.E. Gilbert, of course, supported the move. In a bitter and divisive

- election, Abilene won the necessary two-thirds vote of the county residents.
- 10. Barbed wire**
Gilbert took the side of settlers and farmers in the explosive issue of free grass vs. barbed wire, believing that the future growth of the area depended on bringing in residents to settle here. His stand cost him the support of the open range cattlemen, and his newspaper lost money for 18 months in a row.
- 11. The first fair**
C. E. Gilbert and the *Reporter* organized Abilene's first fair in 1884 to show off produce being raised in this area.
- 12. Unfriendly competitor**
William L. Gibbs, a part-time preacher, founded the *Magnetic Quill* in 1882. He opposed Gilbert on nearly every issue. Gilbert favored the settlers, Gibbs the open range cowmen. Gilbert favored incorporating the town, Gibbs opposed it. Gilbert was against labor unions, Gibbs was for them. Gibbs suggested that some of the produce for Gilbert's heralded fair had been grown elsewhere and secretly shipped in. The competition was bitter, personal and costly.
- 13. Friendly competitor**
Faced with financial losses, in 1885 Gilbert turned the *Reporter* from a weekly into a daily. And he encouraged one of his employees, J.A. Lowry, to start a third newspaper, the *Taylor County News*, to dilute the opposition. Many years later the *Reporter* would buy out the *News*, forming what eventually would become the *Reporter-News*.
- 14. Shots fired**
The bitterness between C.E. Gilbert and William L. Gibbs finally led to a showdown — a duel on the street in front of First National Bank on April 21, 1885. Five shots were fired in all, but no one was seriously hurt.
The *Taylor County News* headlined its account of the duel: "San Jacinto's Day Celebrated by a Shooting Match — An Editorial Encounter In Which They Try to Prove That The Sword Is Mightier Than The Pen."
Gibbs shut down the *Magnetic Quill* in September 1885. Gilbert stayed in town a while longer, but after the duel resigned as Sunday school superintendent of First Methodist Church, where he was a founding member.
- 15. Gone to Dallas**
C. E. Gilbert sold the *Reporter* in May 1886 and moved to Dallas where he published the *Dallas Herald*, which later became the *Dallas Times Herald*. He would go from there to publish newspapers in Nacogdoches, Austin and Bay City. He organized and headed the Texas Afternoon Press Association and the Southern Afternoon Press Association.

Continued on Page 2F



Above:
The front page of the *Abilene Morning Reporter-News*' 50th Anniversary Edition, in 1931.

Left: The *Abilene Reporter* force, 1886: sitting, left to right: S. L. Neely, C.E. Gilbert, Ira Stanley; standing, left to right: T.A. Laughery, G.W. Felker, Alex Sayage, Lewis Fridell.

Right: The 1920 *Reporter* newsroom, including a young Frank Grimes (right foreground), takes time for a photograph for posterity.



Reporter-News file photos