

# Bunchgrass Historian

Whitman County Historical Society Quarterly

Volume 15 No. 1

Colfax, Washington

Spring 1987



- **Wilson Hall**
- **Early Reminiscences  
of Rosalia**
- **Publications of Note**

# CONTENTS

Wilson Hall by Harold Helton.....	3
Early Reminiscences of Rosalia by Mr. M.H. West and Vernon Towne .....	14
Publication of Note .....	23

## THE AUTHORS

Harold Helton wrote his history of Wilson Hall when a student at Washington State University in the early 1980s. Two earlier articles on the history of the university have appeared in earlier issues of **Bunchgrass Historian**.

The essay on Rosalia comes from typescript copies found in various libraries. The author was a Rosalia pioneer.

---

**The Bunchgrass Historian** is published four times a year by the Whitman County Historical Society. Its purpose is to further interest in the rich past of Whitman County.

### OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

President.....Robert Luedeking  
Vice President.....Don Hilty-Jones  
Secretary.....Vivian Hamm  
Treasurer.....Barbara Jean Collins

### PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

Editor.....Lawrence Stark  
Associate Editors.....Suzanne Myklebust  
Fred Bohm  
Editorial Consultant.....William F. Wilbert  
Subscriptions.....Gwenlee Riedel  
Circulation Editor.....Margo Balzarini  
Back Issues.....Susan Bohm

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

Contribution Range  
—Basic Membership.....\$7.50-\$12.50  
—Contributing or Family  
Membership.....\$12.50-\$24.50  
—Sustaining Membership.....\$25-\$49.00  
—Sponsor.....\$50-\$99.00  
—Patron.....\$100 and up  
—Life Membership.....\$500  
—Business Membership.....\$25.00 or more  
Membership in the Whitman County  
Historical Society is tax deductible to the  
extent permitted by law.

### SOCIETY ADDRESSES

#### Society Business:

Whitman County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 67  
Colfax, WA. 99111

#### Memberships and subscriptions

Gwenlee Reidel  
Membership Committee  
Whitman County Historical Society  
SW 220 Blaine  
Pullman, WA 99163

#### Articles for Publication:

Lawrence R. Stark, Editor  
**The Bunchgrass Historian**  
P.O. Box 2371 C.S.  
Pullman, WA. 99163

#### Current and Back Issues:

(Send \$2.50 per issue)  
Susan Bohm, Sales Editor

#### The Bunchgrass Historian

SW 405 State Street  
Pullman, WA 99163

# Wilson Hall

by  
Harold E. Helton

*Note: This article deals with the history of Washington State University. This topic is rather important in the history of Whitman County. Nevertheless, **Bunchgrass Historian** generally has not carried many writings about the university, possibly for fear that there would soon be too many. Articles on the history of WSU are always welcomed as submissions, however.*

*The following article was submitted a few years ago and held until the present issue in order to put some intervals between it and the last article on the university that was published in **Bunchgrass Historian**.*

A good measure of the worth of any public building is its ability to adapt to different uses. The more flexible a building is, the better return tax payers get on their investment. Wilson Hall, located atop College Hill, on the campus of Washington State University, has served taxpayers very well for more than seventy years. It is ironic that for nearly a decade after its construction, it hardly was used at all.

Washington State University, founded in 1890 as the Washington Agricultural College and School of Science, grew rapidly during its first twenty years. New programs were added, and soon it became well known as both a school for the sciences and as a liberal arts college.

By 1910, the largest number of students were enrolled in the College of Agriculture and in the department of Mechanical Arts.<sup>1</sup> In that year, State College president Enoch A. Bryan persuaded the board of regents to house both disciplines in their own buildings, as befitted their important place within the State College. College architect Rudolph Weaver was ordered to design the buildings. Bryan insisted that the appearance of the Agriculture building, should “dignify agricultural education in the eyes of the youth and of the people generally.”<sup>2</sup>



*Tractor short course, 1924.*

### **The Grand Temple of Agriculture**

In the early twentieth century, many American public buildings imitated Italian Renaissance architectural styles, and Rudolph Weaver designed the exterior of the Agriculture building along these lines. He installed massively linteled, arched doorways and windows. With flattened pillasters and relief work, he gave the exterior an absolutely symmetrical appearance. The 73,000 square foot building would house all Agriculture laboratories, classrooms, and offices under one roof.<sup>3</sup> Its rear face would be U-shaped, and enclose an elegant, glass-walled, stock judging pavilion. The front of the building would be graced by a long, graceful, granite stairway that rose to meet an Italianate portico enclosing the front entrance to the building. The east and west entrances of the buildings would have less elegant but equally massive porticos.<sup>4</sup>

At the June 12, 1913 meeting of the board of regents, the board approved President Bryan's recommendation that the building be named in honor of James Wilson, the United States Secretary of Agriculture (1897-1913) who played a key role in establishing land-grant colleges (like Washington State College) and who, according to Bryan, had "laid the greatest Agriculture Department among the nations."<sup>5</sup>

The board of regents approved Bryan's recommendation that the "hull and roof" of the building be completed "ending with the boards

and glass, and postponing the plastering, stairways, and all finishing until the money is in sight,” and that construction bids be accepted both for the finished building and for “the walls, floors and roof, with roughed in plumbing” to be completed within twelve to fifteen months.<sup>6</sup>

The money to which the regents referred was revenue raised by the annual state mill tax of 1.05 mills on all real property in the state. The State College’s share of the mill tax was 0.325 mills, which was to be used for maintenance, support and improvement. It was not enough to meet normal operating expenses and provide for completion of Wilson Hall. To eliminate the costly, and very time-consuming, problem of matching building materials over the several years, the regents ordered the immediate completion of exterior and interior walls, the roof, and the floors, using the \$150,000.00 available that year for work on the building.\* All interior finishing would await allocation of further funding from the mill tax.<sup>8</sup>

### **Construction Begins**

During the first week of August 1913, bids were accepted from construction firms. All construction bids had to be accompanied by a certified check for ten percent of the amount of the bid (as a guaranty of good faith), payable to the order of the board of regents. Companies could obtain copies of building plans and specifications for \$25.00. This fee was refunded when the plans were returned.<sup>9</sup> A low bid of \$198,500.00 was accepted from J.B. Sweatt and Company, of Spokane.<sup>10</sup> Construction began in the spring of 1914, and by June, the basement, ground floor, and adjoining walls were completed.

Dedication ceremonies, held at the college auditorium (now called Bryan Auditorium), began at 3:00 p.m., on Wednesday, June 10, 1914. Presentation of a bronze bust of James Wilson (who was unable to attend due to failing health) and the laying of the cornerstone followed at the building site. In attendance were representatives from the State Farmers Union, the State Grange, and numerous other agriculture organizations, all of whom were invited by the board of regents so that they would be aware of the college’s commitment to leadership in agricultural research.<sup>11</sup> James Calvin Cunningham, president of the W.S.C. board of regents, gave the welcoming address. He described Wilson Hall as being built “for the exclusive uses and purposes of that greatest and grandest of

\*To save money, Wilson Hall and the Mechanical Arts buildings were designed very similarly. Wilson Hall was erected on the crest of College Hill, on what then was the east end of the campus. From that lofty position, the building could be seen from any point on campus.

all the arts and sciences, agriculture.”<sup>12</sup> Henry Wallace Sr., editor of *Wallace's Farmer* and father of Vice President Henry Wallace Jr., thanked the State College on behalf of James Wilson. He was followed by State Supreme Court Chief Justice Herman D. Crow, who read a brief tribute, and Washington governor Ernest Lister, who praised the State College's leadership in the field of agricultural research.

After a brief adjournment to the construction site, President Bryan, with Rudolph Weaver in attendance, accepted the building on behalf of the regents, and presented the bronze bust of James Wilson to the State College. He and Governor Lister then laid the cornerstone.<sup>13</sup>

Construction of walls, roof and floors was completed the following summer. Thereafter, work on the building halted. As the United States stretched its national resources to fill munitions orders for the antagonists in the First World War, construction funds and building materials became scarce. Revenue from the mill tax failed to keep pace with inflation, forcing the State College to cut expenses wherever possible. Under these spartan conditions, completion of Wilson Hall seemed an extravagance to the regents, although Bryan urged them to find a way to do so.<sup>14</sup>

For three years, Wilson Hall stood unfinished: its windows covered with boards; its interior stark and dirty. After America entered the war, a use finally was found for the building. In 1917, the State College of Washington contracted with the United States Army to teach technical and vocational skills to hundreds of soldiers. This produced a severe housing shortage on campus. Because Wilson Hall was not being used for any other purpose, the regents decided to use it as a military barracks.<sup>15</sup>

When the war ended, the State College expected the state legislature to allocate money immediately for the completion of Wilson Hall, but it was not to be. Postwar inflation and unemployment absorbed the attention of the legislators for several years after the war. Nothing more was done about Wilson Hall, except to install a weather station in the attic of the building, taking advantage of its high position atop College Hill.<sup>16</sup> Rudolph Weaver continued perfecting designs for the interior of the building, if ever it would be completed.<sup>17</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, enrollment at Washington State College, and particularly in the College of Agriculture, increased dramatically.<sup>18</sup> Classroom, laboratory and office space were stretched to the limit. An independent panel of Spokane-area business and professional men surveyed the campus, at the request of president Ernest O. Holland, and reported an alarming situation:

We found the buildings overcrowded, halls and attics often being used for recitation rooms, to the detriment of the health and progress of the students. The chemistry laboratories, the shops, the home eco-

nomics building, and the gymnasium were striking examples of this condition . . . We found that the Agriculture Building had remained in an unfinished condition for ten years. They should be finished without delay.<sup>19</sup>

In 1920, the state legislature allocated money to finish putting up interior walls and rough-in plumbing on the third floor of Wilson Hall.<sup>20</sup> Not until 1925 and 1927, in special sessions of the state House, was funding finally obtained for completing the building.<sup>21</sup> Almost immediately, the granite front steps were installed, and doors and windows were fitted. Then, in quick succession, came an army of heating and ventilation contractors, plasterers, carpenters, varnishers and painters. Stanley A. Smith, Rudolph Weaver's successor as college architect, scrapped plans to construct a stock judging pavilion at the rear of the building. Stock pavilions already were located elsewhere on campus. Instead, he built a machine shop which spanned the length of the building on its south side. The interior walls of laboratories and offices were finished with raised oak paneling, and grand stairways graced both wings of the building.<sup>22</sup> If Smith's design appeared to be somewhat more functional than Weaver's, it was no less elegant.

At last, the State College of Washington had its grand temple of agriculture. Within a decade, though, Wilson Hall's facilities would be eclipsed by a rapidly expanding student body, and a rapidly expanding College of Agriculture.

### **Expansion of the College of Agriculture**

Between 1933 and 1939, enrollment in the College of Agriculture increased 140 percent.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the College of Agriculture expanded services to include nine departments (Agriculture, Agriculture Education, Forest and Range Management, Agriculture Engineering, Agronomy, Animal Husbandry, Soil Conservation, Agriculture Experimental Station Service, and Agriculture Extension Services). Laboratory and classroom space became increasingly scarce, forcing the College of Agriculture to convert ground floor and basement offices for those purposes.

Moreover, Wilson Hall took on several non-academic functions. It served the Pacific Northwest as its primary agriculture information and conference center. It was the site of annual short summer courses, for farmers, both in gasoline engine and tractor operation and repair, and in the care of truck gardens and fruit farms. Furthermore, Wilson Hall was the site of an annual Dairy Institute, and of annual meetings of the Future Farmers of America, the Washington State 4-H Club, and other local livestock organizations. Finally, the building was used every summer to teach vocational classes to students from the Smith-Hughes High School.<sup>24</sup>

A dairy sciences building (Troy Hall) was opened in the late 1920s, to take some of the pressure off Wilson Hall, but even so, the growing responsibilities of the College of Agriculture continued to stretch the resources of Wilson Hall.

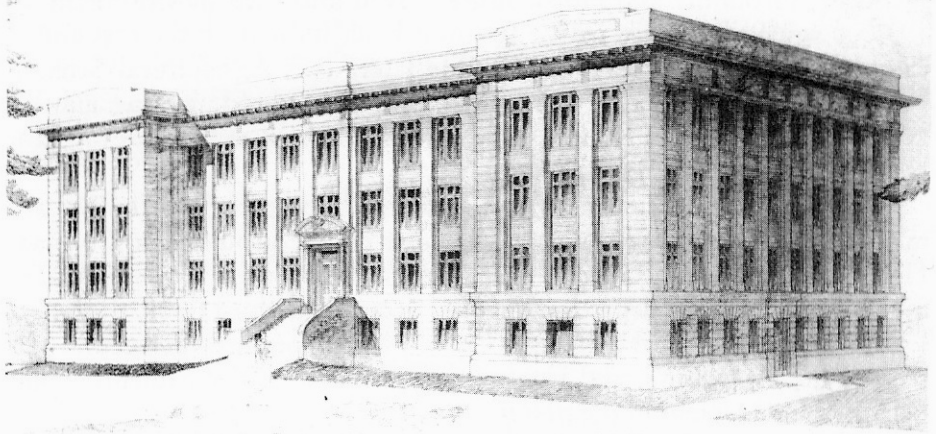
As America approached the Second World War, President Holland recognized the vitally important role agriculture would play in feeding a war-torn world. There would be a tremendous need to discover ways to stretch existing food supplies, and an equally great need to discover synthetic foods, fuels and fibers. However, just as the First World War created severe inflation and produced shortages of nearly all durable goods, so, too, would the Second World War create enormous problems for both the American people and for their colleges.

As early as October 1940, President Holland complained to state and federal agencies about the College of Agriculture's inability to procure necessary equipment for conducting government research. He complained that funds promised by the government for research and instruction were being siphoned to defense-related projects.<sup>25</sup>

After America entered the war, agricultural research facilities at Washington State College became overloaded by Defense Department research on crop rotation and irrigation, infestation control, the introduction of new crops to Northwest farms, freezing and dehydration technology, and soil preservation. To make room for all this new research, in addition to the College of Agriculture's own research, the extension service centers had to absorb as much of the work as possible. Any remaining work had to be squeezed into Wilson Hall as best it could. There was no money for additional research facilities.<sup>26</sup> Added to this serious problem was the even larger problem of finding enough faculty and staff to perform all these services. The war took a heavy toll on department personnel. Those who remained behind carried ever heavier burdens.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the war, Wilson Hall served one extraordinary function for which it certainly never was intended. Air Force and Navy medium and long-range bombers, flying out of bases throughout the Pacific Northwest, required suitable places to practice hazardous low-level and "skip" bombing techniques. The more difficult the terrain over which they flew, the sharper would be their skills. The rolling Palouse countryside provided excellent ground for sharpening skills. Bombardiers found ideal targets at the State College of Washington. In particular, they liked Wilson Hall and the clock tower at Bryan Auditorium. Circling low over nearby Moscow, Idaho, the two- and four-engined bombers flew at full speed, and at tree top level, straight at Wilson Hall, pulling up only seconds before "dropping bombs" on the building. Everyone and everything inside the building was shaken severely. Such were the hazards of working in Wilson Hall during the war.<sup>27</sup>





SKETCH OF JAMES WILSON HALL  
THE STATE COLLEGE OF WASHINGTON  
RUDOLPH BRAUER - ARCHITECT.

*Wilson Hall, architect's rendering.*

With the war's end, the Agriculture departments at Washington State College returned to normal pursuits. Anticipating another dramatic increase in student enrollment, the board of regents pleaded with the state legislature to finance additional campus facilities. Beef cattle barns had been built near the end of the war and some Quonset hut equipment sheds were added to the east end of campus in 1947. A major step was taken by the erection of an agriculture engineering research laboratory the next year,<sup>28</sup> and horticultural greenhouses were constructed in the early 1950s.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, much overdue repairs and improvements were made to Wilson Hall. A Wheat Quality Laboratory was installed in 1947, as well as a Soils Grinding Laboratory. In 1960, the first floor and basement were remodeled.<sup>30</sup>

As the years passed, the College of Agriculture grew and required vastly larger facilities than were available in Wilson Hall. In time, an entirely new Agriculture center would have to be built. Wilson Hall, the temple of agriculture, would have to find a new role to play.

By 1957, the number of students who declared majors in Agriculture had risen from the pre-war high of 417 to an unprecedented 658.<sup>31</sup> Classroom and laboratory facilities at Wilson Hall were swamped. Many class sections were moved to Troy Hall, Science Hall, and other campus buildings. This dispersal of activities was both inefficient and unbecoming to one of the nation's largest and most distinguished agriculture research and education centers. And even more students were expected in the decade of the 1960s.

To solve this problem, the board of regents approved an ambitious building program for the College of Agriculture.<sup>32</sup> In 1961, the departments of Agronomy and Horticulture moved into their new home in the 193,000 square foot Edward C. Johnson Hall, located on the east end of campus, on Stadium Way.<sup>33</sup> A decade later, two Agricultural Sciences buildings, Phases I (now Clark Hall) and II, opened, adding another 200,000 square feet of usable space for the College of Agriculture, and leaving Wilson Hall largely vacated.<sup>34</sup>

Except for the Western Wheat Quality Laboratory, and the Department of Rural Sociology, which remained on the ground floor, Wilson Hall was completely converted for use by the Social Science departments.<sup>35</sup> The History department would occupy the third floor, the Sociology department/Social Research Center would occupy the second and part of the first floors, and various minority studies departments would occupy the remainder of the first floor.

The raised oak paneling and wainscoating that had covered the walls were removed and replaced by plaster walls. The raised oak doors also were removed.<sup>36</sup> Although the regents requested that the new interior of Wilson Hall have "fewer walls . . . and more open space," university architect Philip E. Keane informed them that the interior walls and steel structure of the building would not allow it.<sup>37</sup> Final plans were approved, and construction bids were accepted in the summer of 1971.<sup>38</sup> \$1,175,000.00 was budgeted for completion of the project by September 1973.<sup>39</sup>

To give the interior of the building a more modern appearance, the ceilings were lowered, and acoustical ceiling tiles were installed. In turn, the height of the doors and windows were altered to correspond with the new ceilings. Flush doors replaced the old paneled doors, and an elevator was installed in the center of the building.<sup>40</sup>

Because the building served an entirely new purpose, the old classrooms and laboratories on the first, second, and third floors were gutted and replaced with offices for faculty, graduate students, and clerical personnel. Only in the Western Wheat Quality Laboratory were some of the original high ceilings and raised oak paneling retained.

When Wilson Hall reopened in the autumn of 1972, it was intended only to provide office space for the Social Science departments, although each department was given one or more rooms suitable for conducting seminars and holding departmental meetings. A large lecture room and several small classrooms were maintained on the ground floor, but these failed to provide adequate space for all the classes offered through the Social Science departments. For the most part, those departments continued to hold their classes in nearby Todd Hall.

Contributing to the crowding in Wilson Hall was the addition of several new departments and agencies to the building in the 1970s. In 1972, largely due to the insistence of History department chairman Raymond Muse, the Asian Studies Program, until then an orphan program lacking permanent facilities, was given office space on the third floor of Wilson Hall. In 1977, the office of the University Ombudsman opened on the ground floor of the building, and in 1978, the Women Studies Program opened offices on the third floor of Wilson Hall.

Throughout its long history, Wilson Hall has demonstrated the versatility of purpose which is indicative of a well constructed building. Few buildings have served as many roles: Army barracks and instruction center, weather station, Agriculture research and education center, conference center, practice bombing target for the Air Force and Navy, and home for the Social Science departments at Washington State University. Through it all, the building has served well, although it almost never was large enough to perform all the tasks set for it. This resulted not so much from poor building design so much as the failure of college administrators to foresee the rapid growth of the college. By the time Wilson Hall opened as the home of the College of Agriculture, the scope of that college's responsibilities already had outgrown the building's facilities. Even before its official opening in 1926, a second building, Troy Hall, had been constructed to take some of the pressure off Wilson Hall, and plans already were laid for the construction of green houses, off-campus research centers, and stock judging pavilions. Thirty-six years later, when Wilson Hall became the center for University Social Science programs, it did not provide adequate classroom space. Since then, new programs and agencies have found a home in Wilson Hall. What the future holds for the building only may be speculated, but so long as it remains structurally sound, Wilson Hall will provide a handsome home for whomever occupies it.

PROGRAM OF EXERCISES  
 OF  
 Founding of James Wilson Hall  
 THE STATE COLLEGE  
 OF WASHINGTON  
 JUNE 1914

COLLEGE AUDITORIUM  
 Three o'clock

Music STATE COLLEGE ORCHESTRA

Address of Welcome HON. JAS. C. COMMERSON  
 President Board of Regents

Address HON. HENRY WALLACE  
 Editor Wallace's Farmer

Selection SOPHANE ELLIOTT QUARTET

Address JAMES HERMAN D. CROW  
 Chief Justice Supreme Court

Music WOMEN'S CHORAL CLUB OF STATE COLLEGE

Address HIS EXCELLENCY FRANK LUTER  
 Governor State of Washington

Music STATE COLLEGE ORCHESTRA

—  
 JAMES WILSON HALL  
 Following exercises in Auditorium

Music STATE COLLEGE BAND

Presentation of Banner Roll of James Wilson, ex-Secretary  
 United States Department of Agriculture HON. DAVID BEGGIE  
 First Assistant, Office Farm Management  
 United States Bureau of Plant Industry

Acceptance PARSONS F. A. BEVAN  
 State College of Washington

Laying of Corner Stone GOVERNOR FRANK LUTER

Music STATE COLLEGE BAND

*Dedicatory  
 Program, 1914.*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Enoch A. Bryan, *Historical Sketch of the State College of Washington*, (Pullman, Wa.: Alumni and Associated Students, 1928), pp. 1-82.

<sup>2</sup>State College of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Board of Regents* (Olympia, Wa.: E.L. Boardman, Public Printer, 1911), p.17.

<sup>3</sup>Washington State University, Department of Facilities Planning, *On-Campus Space Building Inventory Roster*, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>Drawings, blueprints, and specification sheets of Rudolph Weaver are located at the Department of Facilities Planning, Washington State University.

<sup>5</sup>Washington State University, Office of the President, *Regents' Records*, V, p.68.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid*, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup>James Calvin Cunningham, *James Calvin Cunningham* (n.p., 1941), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup>*Regents' Records*, V, pp. 67, 81.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup>*ibid*, p. 81.

<sup>11</sup>*ibid*, p. 99.

<sup>12</sup>Cunningham, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid*, p. 13; Program of Founding Ceremonies for Wilson Hall, June 10, 1914, in photograph vertical file on Wilson Hall (building number 40), Washington State University: Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections (MASC).

<sup>14</sup>William M. Landeen, *E. D. Holland and the State College of Washington, 1916-1944* (Pullman, Wa.: State College of Washington, 1958), p.144.

<sup>15</sup>Harold E. Helton, "WAZZU At War: Washington State College During the Great War," *Whitman County Historical Society Quarterly*, 10 (3), Fall 1982: 3-21.

<sup>16</sup>Wilson Hall photograph file, MASC.

<sup>17</sup>Weaver drawings.

<sup>18</sup>State College of Washington, *A Ten-Year Report of the Board of Regents, 1926-1935* (Pullman, Wa.: State College of Washington, 1936), p. 6; *Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report of the Board of Regents* (Pullman, Wa.: State College of Washington, 1940), pp. 64, 157.

<sup>19</sup>State College of Washington, *A Summary of the Needs of the State College of Washington, As Determined by a Committee of Business and Professional Men* (Spokane, Wa., 1925), p. 2.

<sup>20</sup>State College of Washington, *Fourteenth Biennial Report of the Board of Regents* (Olympia, Wa.: Frank M. Lanborn, Public Printer, 1921), p. 8; Landeen, p. 145.

<sup>21</sup>Bryan, p.461; Landeen, p. 151.

<sup>22</sup>Drawings, blueprints and specification sheets of Stanley A. Smith are located at the Department of Facilities Planning, Washington State University.

<sup>23</sup>*Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report*, p. 64.

<sup>24</sup>*ibid*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>25</sup>*Pullman Herald*, October 11, 1940, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>26</sup>*Evergreen*, October 10, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup>*Evergreen*, September 28, 1943, p. 3; "State College of Washington, Board of Regents Six Year Report for the Period Ending April 1, 1945," *State College of Washington Bulletin*, 7 (18), November 15, 1946: 11.

<sup>28</sup>*On-Campus Space Inventory Building Roster*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>29</sup>*ibid*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>30</sup>Washington State University, Department of Facilities Planning, *Annual Building Replacement Cost Index*, 1982.

<sup>31</sup>State College of Washington, *Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report of the Board of Regents* (Pullman, Wa.: State College of Washington, 1947), pp. 22-26; State College of Washington, *Thirty-Third Biennial Report of the Board of Regents* (Pullman, Wa.: State College of Washington, 1957), p. 8.

<sup>32</sup>Enrollment records may be obtained at the Registrar's Office, Washington State University; *Regents' Records*, XVIII, p. 388; XIX, pp. 123-24; XX, pp. 85, 118, 346, 353; XXI, p. 275.

<sup>33</sup>*On-Campus Space Inventory Building Roster*, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup>*ibid*, pp. 1, 4; *Regents Records*, XXI, pp. 227, 273, 294; XXII, p. 65.

<sup>35</sup>"Thirty-Ninth Biennial Report and Budget Request," Washington State University, *Bulletin*, 29 (4), December 1968: 34.

<sup>36</sup>Drawings, blueprints, and specification sheets of Philip E. Keane are located at the Department of Facilities Planning, Washington State University.

<sup>37</sup>*Regents records*, XXI, p. 425.

<sup>38</sup>*ibid*, pp. 124, 281, 453.

<sup>39</sup>*ibid*, p. 425.

<sup>40</sup>Keane drawings.



# Early Reminiscences of Rosalia

by  
Mrs. M. H. West  
As dictated to her grandson,  
Vernon W. Towne,  
about 1930

*Note: The following essay on the early history of Rosalia was written over fifty years ago. Hence the author employs some expressions and vocabulary of that time. Other histories of Rosalia cover some similar ground, and indeed some may have borrowed from one of the typescript copies of this essay.*

— Editor

Half a century ago the fertile hills of Eastern Wasington were covered with heavy bunch grass where lurked the stealthy coyote, and only an occasional Indian village dotted the beautiful valleys where now prosperous cities and towns flourish. The hand of civilization had not yet turned into usefulness all the wonderful, natural resources of the country, for the Indian was lord of all.

White settlements had been established west of the Cascade Mountains, however, and Washington Territory formed, and in the late fifties the Walla Walla Valley was thrown open to settlement. With the coming of the whites into that region, the apparent friendliness of the Indians changed to jealous hatred, and war began.

In the spring of 1858, after repeated indignities at the hands of the hostile tribes, Colonel Steptoe, in command of the military post at Walla Walla, was ordered out to quell the disturbance, and on the sixth of May, with a small band of soldiers, he left the fort and began the march northward. Reaching Snake River, which was very high, the troops were ferried over by Timothy, a friendly Nez Perce chief, who with a band of his own men, voluntarily accompanied Steptoe into the upper country.

It was a hard march, for the enemy sprang up at every turn. After reaching a point about fifteen miles north of Rosalia, with the supply of ammunition almost exhausted and surrounded on all sides by the Indians,

Colonel Steptoe was forced to retreat. Late in the evening of the eighteenth of May, the troops were brought to a halt on the brow of the hill in the southeastern part of where the city of Rosalia is now located. Here it was decided that the only way to escape the horrible death that confronted them on every side, was to leave all baggage, and steal across the canyon and up the bluffs to the southwest in the dead of night.

Accordingly, the dead were buried, the wounded tied to packhorses, and with all possible stealth, the weary little band of soldiers followed their faithful friend, Timothy, over a hazardous trail to the southwest, a trail left unguarded by the Indians as it was supposed to be entirely unknown to any of Steptoe's party.

All through the night the retreat continued; a retreat so full of hardship as to be almost unendurable. Several of the brave soldiers became so fatigued that they were compelled to fall by the wayside, knowing full well what a horrible fate would befall them at the hands of their merciless foe.

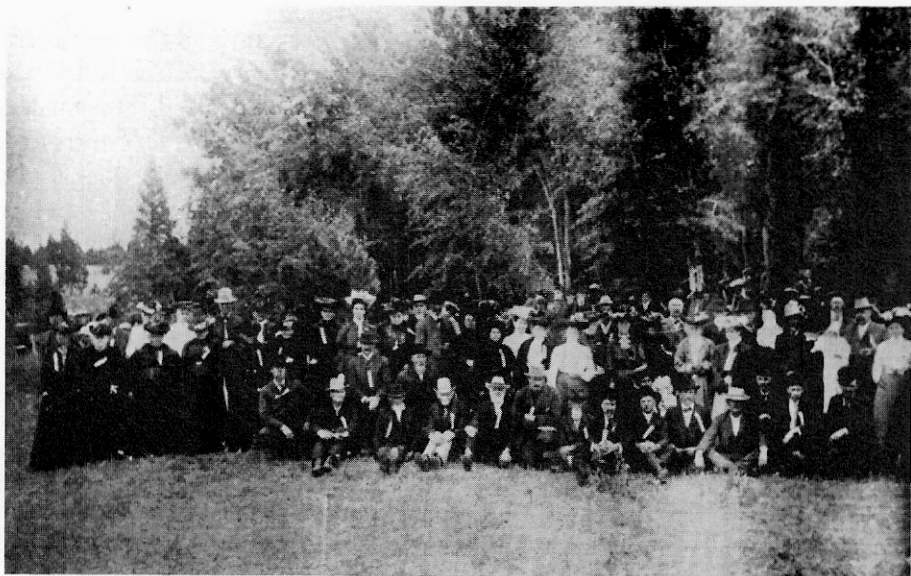
After twenty-four hours of suffering, the party reached Snake River where the loyal Timothy, obtaining the assistance of his tribe, threw up a defense along the trail they had passed over, and while the friendly Indians kept guard, others ferried the soldiers across the river, from which place the march to Walla Walla was comparatively easy. And to the brave Indian Timothy must the credit of escape be given, for without his help all would have perished.

This retreat from the battle is the first history we have of the vicinity of Rosalia. During the next few years various scouting and exploring parties passed through this part of the country, but not until ten years later, in 1868, did any one try to settle in the community. Then a few adventurous stockmen, making peace with the Indians, brought their horses and cattle to this vicinity to feed on the bunch grass which grew so luxuriantly on the fertile hills.

The first real history of Rosalia commences in 1870, when a government post office was established at the home of T. J. Favorite, one of the stockmen, who had taken up a homestead about two miles north of the present site of Rosalia. This post office was named for Mr. Favorite's wife, whose given name was Rosalia, and what little mail reached the office was carried, at rare intervals, on horseback.

The first settlement within the present limits of Rosalia was made in 1871, when J. M. Whitman and his wife took up a homestead, including the present farm of M. H. West, and purchased also a quarter section of railroad land upon which the business district of the town is now located.

At this time even the most imaginative minds never dreamed of this becoming a grain or fruit country. The conception at this time was that it was to be a great stock country, and the settlers had the now seemingly



*Rosalia pioneer picnic, ca. 1906.*

absurd idea that gooseberries and currants, which grew wild along the creek, were the only fruits that could ever be grown here.

During this year and the next two or three years a good many more stockmen came, prominent among them being William and T. F. Donahoe, J. M. Richardson, J. E. Kennedy, and M. E. Choate. Some of these new settlers began to experiment and found that the land which they had formerly supposed would raise nothing but the native grasses, was the most wonderfully productive body of land in the Pacific Northwest, and that wheat and other small grains grew abundantly on the hills as well as in the valleys. Gradually the tillers of the soil crowded out the stockmen, or to be more exact, the stockmen were converted into farmers, and soon magnificent fields of grain waved over the hills where but a few years before the wandering Indian had roamed among the bunch grass.

Within the next ten years the more progressive settlers began also to experiment with the hardier varieties of fruits and vegetables, and the satisfactory yield resulted in larger experiments until almost every land owner had put out a small orchard. At this time trout were very plentiful in Pine Creek at certain seasons of the year, and prairie chickens flocked everywhere, making fishing and hunting favorite sports of the ranchmen. It was no uncommon thing, several years later, in my own home for my husband to get up from the breakfast table at hearing a flock of the prairie chickens light on the house, and bring in a few moments later, enough chickens to supply our table with meat for a week.

About the year 1871, an extensive stage line began to operate





*Rosalia street scene.*

throughout this region. This was the Northwestern Stage Company, and connected the Central Pacific Railroad at Kelton, Utah, with The Dalles, Pendleton, Walla Walla, Colfax, Dayton, Lewiston, Pomeroy, and all points north and west. Local stage lines also operated in all directions, connecting with each other all the principal points of the country and transporting passengers and freight to Snake River to be there loaded on the boats. It was one of these branch stage lines which carried the mail and pioneer homeseekers to this new settlement of Rosalia. For a stage station had been established and an inn opened to accommodate travelers, on the farm of J. M. Whitman, the buildings being erected on the now vacant corner lot just south of the present home of M. H. West.

In the early seventies, Mr. Favorite becoming tired of the service of Uncle Sam, the post office was transferred to Mr. Whitman, who fitted up one corner of his living room with a dry goods box partitioned off into pigeon holes, and handed out mail to an occasional inquirer.

During these early years Walla Walla was the nearest source of household supply, the thrifty housewife having to send there for even such minor necessities as thread and needles. But in 1872 the first store to be established in Whitman County, was opened in Colfax, and this store supplied the urgent needs of the surrounding country, the settlers still making semi-annual trips to Walla Walla for their spring and fall supply of groceries and general merchandise.

In this same year, 1872, the first school house in Whitman County was erected. It was a box stucture about twenty by thirty feet in size, and though amply large for the needs of the time, it certainly was not large enough in proportion to the district it was to serve, for that district included not only the whole of Whitman County, but also the present Franklin County and a large portion of Adams County.

During these years there was at all times more or less uneasiness concerning the Indians, for not withstanding the fact that these tribes were for the most part favorably disposed, and that prior to 1877, none of them had been on the warpath since their defeat by Colonel Wright, the early settlers were inclined to be distrustful of them. And in 1877 their fears were verified. In the summer of that year Chief Joseph's band of Nez Perces took up arms and reports gained currency that the Palouses, Spokanes, and Coeur d'Alenes had also gone on the warpath, and that Chief Moses was on his way south to join the hostile forces. This excitement resulted in the building of a block house near Palouse City, one hundred and twenty-five feet square, and this served two hundred people several days as a protection against possible danger. A smaller fort was also erected at Pine City and kept in readiness in case of need. During this reign of terror the settlers in our own vicinity fearing destruction of life and property, took their blankets and for several nights slept with their families under cover of the brush along the banks of the creek.

The winter brought peace again for a time, but in the summer of 1878 there was another alarm, and a fort was built north of Rosalia on the hill just east of where Mrs. Connolly now lives. The women got everything in readiness to go at a moments' warning; food and bedding were prepared, clothing packed, and knitting or other needlework tucked in, to while away the tedious hours of confinement. However, the stockade was not needed, and this scare ended the Indian troubles in Eastern Washington.

The next few years witnessed a rapid development of the Inland Empire. Spokane sprang into existence, and in 1879 a telegraph line was constructed through Rosalia from Colfax to Spokane, and thus began our first communication with the outside World.

At this time there was a little settlement at Pine City, where church services were occasionally held, and many of us frequently drove, or rode horseback to attend these services. We found it no harder to go and be punctual then, than now when our churches are near our homes. As Rosalia grew, the different homes were thrown open for services, until the erection of our school house after which church was held more regularly.

It was in 1879 that the first general merchandise stock was put in Rosalia by J. M. Whitman in one room of his house. This was enlarged as the need required. All supplies for this store were shipped from San Francisco



*Rosalia Favorite,  
for whom the  
town was named.*

by water to Penawawa, Washington and then freighted by team to Rosalia. This slow transportation made all heavy goods very high, the freight charges from Snake River being about \$1.50 per hundred pounds. Dry goods being light in weight were but little more expensive than at the present time, and beef and mutton much cheaper. It may be of interest for me to quote a few of the prices paid for goods during those years. These figures are taken from an old ledger used by Mr. Whitman, and in my possession at the present time. Coal Oil, 75¢ per gallon; laundry soap, 25¢ per bar; flour, \$7.00 to \$7.50 per barrel; salt, \$3.50 per cwt.; sugar, 6 pounds for \$1.00; blacksmith's coal, \$80.00 per ton. Lard and bacon were high, owing to the cost of feed, but choice cuts of beef could be purchased for 5½¢ per pound, and freshly dressed mutton or lamb sold for \$1.50 each.

At this time the wages paid for ordinary farm labor was from \$20.00 to \$25.00 a month, with board furnished, and girls for general housework could be hired for \$2.50 a week, as there was very little occupation for girls at this time, and they were glad to earn a few dollars of their own in this way.

By the year 1879, small school districts were established throughout the country, making possible the first institute ever held in Whitman County, on May 29th, and 30th 1879. Rev. Cushing Eels, the famed missionary hero, who was then County Superintendent of Schools, presided. Rosalia was not represented at this Institute, however, our school not having been established until three years later. Then, in 1882, a small box house was erected on the lot now owned by L. A. Brockway, and our first school was begun. For three months this was maintained by subscription, that length of term being necessary before school money could be drawn. The teachers salary was \$25.00 or \$30.00 per month, board being furnished by the patrons in the old times "Boarding-round" system.

The winters, at this time, were often very severe, and the great flood of the spring of 1881, following the blizzards and heavy snows of the previous winter will ever be remembered by the pioneers of this section. On November, 30th, the great blizzard of 1880 began and all travelers were



*Pritchard House*

**Classic  
Rosalia  
Residences**



*R.S. Howard House*



*Brockway House*

halted wherever the storm overtook them, and for a week dared not venture forth. If you will excuse a personal reminiscence I shall mention my own experience in this terrible storm. My husband and I were returning from Colfax at the time, and having been driving all morning in a heavy, wet snow, my husband insisted on our staying all night at the inn, owned by Cashup Davis, although we could easily have reached home before dark. About midnight the blizzard began, and such a one I have never seen since. For three days it increased in fury, the thermometer hovering around the zero mark and a northeast wind blowing a terrific gale. The inn was crowded to its utmost capacity, about thirty people being storm-bound in the house, and one small cook stove, with a broken oven door, provided not only food, but warmth for the entire party, there being no other stoves in the house. But the landlady was never cross, she and her family made us forget our woes, and our stay there was a time of continual merriment. At the end of a week, when the storm was over, snow was over three feet deep on a level and in many places the drifts were twenty feet high. A great many cattle and sheep perished during the long winter.

This snow remained on the ground until February, and then when the thaw came, one may imagine what sort of a flood we had. Again all travel was stopped for days, for at that time there were no bridges in the country, and during the high water none of the streams could be forded. I remember that a party of Easterners among them a wealthy New York woman and two sons who had been visiting a relative in one of the military forts farther north, were flood-bound in the old Whitman Hotel, and I shall never forget their pitiful attempts to make the best of things. Her room, in one corner of a very large room where there were four beds, all occupied, being partitioned by a calico curtain. The hotel, like the rest of the houses in this new country, was very roughly built, and the furnishings distinctly pioneer. No paper adorned the walls, and the only bedroom furniture was a homemade bedstead and perhaps one chair. No toilet articles graced the rooms, the only mirror being a very small one hung over a shelf in the kitchen where one tin washpan supplied the entire house. This lack of needful accommodations was very trying to this aristocratic woman, and very impatiently did she wait for the water to subside. Just as soon as the ice was out of the creek, plans were made to ferry the stage coach and its passengers across to the other side, and I shall never forget the joy in the face of that woman when the plans were completed whereby they could continue their journey. A rude boat having been built, was put in the water just west of the barn (now owned by M. H. West) and where the Northern Pacific R. R. now is, and from there rowed to a narrow place south and west of our present school site. The stage driver was rowed across with a long rope tied to a horse, which he led over, and in this way all the horses were swam across, after which they were hitched to

the stage coach, also tied to the long ropes and pulled across, after which the passengers, baggage and mail, were rowed over, and they went on their way rejoicing.

Not until 1884 was the main line of the Northern Pacific Rail Road completed, and with its completion this section began to enjoy better shipping facilities. The farmers hauled their grain and other produce to Cheney, where it was loaded on the cars for transportation; and flour and lumber mills being established throughout the county, the pioneers' life lost some of its hardships.

Three years later, in 1887, the branch line of the Northern Pacific from Spokane to Rosalia, was completed, and from that date the town grew rapidly. J. M. Whitman had previously, in 1886, had the present townsite platted, and with the coming of the railroad his general merchandise store and a small hardware and blacksmith shop owned by M. H. West, were moved from their old locations to the present business section.

It might be said in passing that Mr. Whitman did not live to enjoy the reward of his labor and self-denial in the building up of the community. After working patiently for more than a decade, waiting and hoping for the railroad, he met his death just as the track was near completion. Riding out one day on a handcar to a point just south of the present townsite, the car jumped the track and Mr. Whitman sustained injuries from which he soon died.

After the settling of the estate of Mr. Whitman, M. H. West and A. B. Gregg purchased the merchandise stock formerly owned by him, and for a time conducted the business in the new town.

About this time the Anderson Brother's hardware store was built, and Miss Grace Anderson opened a small millinery store. C. Schurra came the same year and opened up a black smith shop on the lot now occupied by Mr. Hall, and in a little house just back of the shop Oscar Schurra was born, he being the first child born within the city limits.

In 1887, Dr. Leonard also erected a building and put in a stock of drugs, he having been practising in the country for about a year. This store known for so many years as the R. Leonard Drug Company has only recently given place to a new brick building, as has also the building occupied by J. G. Hardesty. These two buildings were among the very first to be erected in the present town of Rosalia, the latter having at first been used for the General Merchandise store of J. M. Whitman.

This period in my narrative brings my reminiscences to a point within the memory of nearly all of our older inhabitants, and while those pioneer days were fought with so many hardships and difficulties, they were very happy days, and we older pioneers often look back to them and call them our happiest days, being so free from the cares, and troubles, and temptations of the outside world.

## ● Publication of Note ●

*Whitman County from Abbeville to Zion* by Edith E. Erickson. (Colfax, Wash.: E.E. Erickson, 1985 [Colfax, Wash.: University Printing & Copying], 140 pages. \$12.95.

Whitman County is the home of Tennessee Flat, Pyramid Peak and Orayatayous Creek. It was also the location of railroad stations and sidings with such names as Trestle Creek, Sokulk, Ringo, Pandora, Gravel Pit, and Flagpole. These are a few of the interesting names and places listed in Edith Erickson's book.

Ms. Erickson uses the introduction of her book as an overview of the county beginning with the Native Americans who were original occupants to the development of Washington Territory and the formation of Whitman County. Part of the Forward is a list of Place Names with notations as to whether the name applied to geological features, railroads, schools or post offices.

The book is arranged alphabetically listing all schools, post offices, cemeteries, railroad sidings and stations, creeks, buttes, and lakes in Whitman County from 1869 to 1985. Some typical entries: DUSTY Legend says that this settlement was named by early residents because when the wind blew it was always dusty. This may have been so, because on the application for the post office on November 25, 1898, Homer Phenando Allen first made the application for "Allen" as the name of the new post office. He then marked that out and replaced that name with "Dusty". One story says that this was done because of pressure applied by Anna Stenson, an early school teacher, and Mrs. Allen, who felt that "Dusty" was a more appropriate name for the area. The post office was to be located on the Southeast quarter of Section 2, Township 15, Range 42. This was probably the location of Mr. Allen's first general merchandise store which had been established in 1898 also. At first the mail came to Penewawa where people had to go to get it. Later mail was brought to Endicott and hauled out to Dusty for distribution...

SHYROCK school district number 72 was located on Section 6, Township 18, Range 41. It was so named for a large protruding rock along the winding road. The rock looked like a huge grey monster sticking up through the bunchgrass. In one instance a young man on horseback was thrown and killed near that rock when his horse shied and bolted.

A former student that went there his first three years of school particularly remembered the number of teams of horses that shied and ran as they went past the rock...

WILMA School district number 185 was located on Section 14, Township 11, Range 45. It was one of the 1st schools formed in the county before consolidation began to do away with many of the schools. It was established about 1918, only six miles from Lewiston, Idaho, but on the Whitman County side of the river. In later years it became isolated by slack water from the dams on the Snake River. The children were bused to Clarkston, Washington. To get the children there by bus they had to cross the Clearwater River, go through Lewiston, Idaho, cross the Snake River and into Clarkston. This took the children through two towns, three counties, and two states to get to school although the distance was only about six miles. Wilma consolidated with Clarkston in 1956...

Ms. Erickson includes a good bibliography with unpublished materials and private correspondences listed in addition to published books and materials. The last section of the book has maps of Whitman County showing the Ranges, Townships, schools, cemeteries, creeks, rivers, and surfaced highways. Although not entirely legible, it is interesting to be able to place names mentioned in relation to something else.

Ms. Erickson is a retired teacher from Whitman County. She has been interested in local history and written *Colfax 100 Plus*, her first book.

