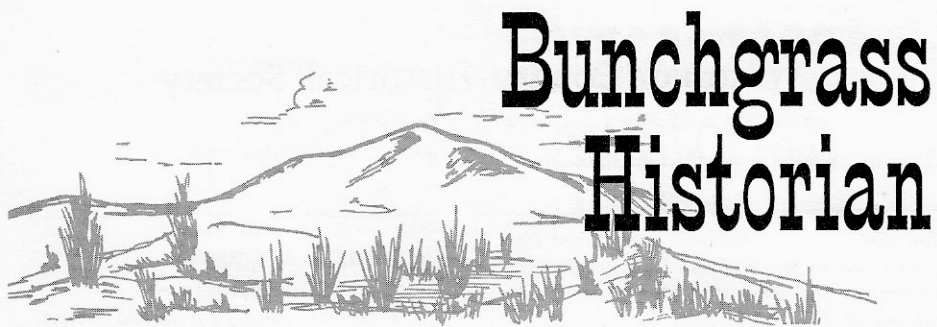


Bunchgrass Historian



Whitman County Historical Society
Colfax, Washington

Volume 20
Number 3
1992



County Fairs

Whitman County Historical Society

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.

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Colfax, WA. 99111

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The Bunchgrass Historian

P.O. Box 2371 C.S.
Pullman, WA. 99163

Current and Back Issues:

(Send \$2.50 per issue)
Whitman County Historical Society
P.O. Box 67
Colfax, WA. 99111





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The Author

Laura Woodworth-Ney is a graduate of the University of Idaho and a graduate student in the Public History Program at Washington State University.

COVER

View of Colfax grandstand, on the fairgrounds, during "Crab Creek Picknick," 1909.



From your editor:

Once in a while *Bunchgrass Historian* receives an article of a length that it results in an issue of one article only. Such an article is featured in the current issue. It presents the history of fairs in Whitman County. The story is complex because fairs have an off and on history in the county. Indeed no one seemed to know even a rough chronology of past fairs at the time the author of this piece undertook to understand the subject. The author managed to unravel this complex story and when it came to publishing it, your editor felt that to cut down the article would leave out too much and so it is presented here in complete, unedited form.

The history of Whitman County's fairs was researched by Laura Woodworth-Ney in the summer of 1992. She prepared this history for the Whitman County Parks and Recreation Department, which has major responsibilities for the present annual fair held every September at the fairground just to the west of Colfax.

The last issue of *Bunchgrass Historian* featured a well-received series of letters by a young woman who was working in a restaurant in Pullman in 1892. Because only a selection of the letters was published and because the sequence abruptly stops, several readers have asked if the remaining letters tell the rest of the story. No, they simply describe life in Pullman and then they stop. But we do know the outcome of the story. The author, Mollie Clark, returned to her home near Corvallis, Oregon, after a little over a year in Pullman. She married the man to whom the letters were addressed, and her subsequent life followed a rather pleasant, if ordinary, path.

In response to another question, I can report that there is no mention of the Washington Agricultural College, now WSU, in the letters. I should also note that some copies of this issue were printed with repeated pages bound in. This sometimes happens with printing; the reader just skips over them, I suppose.

**Whitman County Fairs, 1887-1944:
A Reflection of Agricultural Development
in the Palouse Country**

**by
Laura Woodworth-Ney**

Agricultural fairs have long been a means of educating the farmer, of advertising the appeal of a region, and of raising revenue for a county.¹ Whitman County's fairs also mirrored the developmental stages of the Palouse agricultural community. The volatile tendencies of an economy largely dependent on outside forces — fickle weather patterns, fluctuating markets, variable prices — emerge in an examination of the evolution of the Whitman County fair from its inception in 1887, through its decline in the 1920s, to the rebirth in the years prior to World War II. Population increases, wartime pressures, agricultural development, commercialization, and the consolidation of farm land brought deep-rooted changes to rural society which periodically altered the purpose and goals of the Whitman County Fair.

Early Years

Whitman County's first fairs reflected the regional boosterism of the late 1880s. The arrival of rail service in the Palouse region bolstered agricultural development and encouraged settlement. The Northern Pacific Railroad began servicing its feeder line between Palouse Junction (present-day Connell) and Colfax in 1884, ushering in a cycle of rail construction which by the end of the decade ensured Whitman County farmers a lifeline for their golden grain.² The railroads offered Whitman County settlers access to a larger market while providing them with supplies from outlying regions. Railroad companies also promoted growth

through the sale of land. The Northwestern Improvement Company, a subsidiary of Northern Pacific Railroad, sold more than seven million dollars worth of Palouse farmland between 1880 and 1890. Likewise, the population of Whitman county grew from 19,109 residents in 1890 to 33,280 in 1910.³

Coupled with population growth, high agricultural yields generated optimism in Whitman County. Indeed, the unusually large wheat crop of 1890 caused a railway blockade when the volume of wheat exceeded the number of available railroad cars. Angry farmers watched stockpiled wheat spoil while waiting for transport.⁴ The establishment of the first Whitman County Agricultural Fair Association in April 1887, represented an effort by residents to celebrate and advertise the county's agricultural triumphs. The new Association constructed a race course, grandstand, and exhibit pavilion, which were completed in time for the first fair, held in October 1887. Regarding the pavilion, the *Colfax Commoner* boldly proclaimed that "it is safe to say" that none other "in the territory, will equal it." Despite assurances that the fair would afford "a pleasant, interesting, [and] profitable time" for "all," the *Commoner* issued an "earnest" request that those attending bring an article for display.⁵

Whitman County's first exposition was an experiment in community pride. Its purpose was to showcase "what has already been accomplished in the line of stock breeding and scientific farming" and to "encourage work in the same direction in the future." Fair directors published a list of the monetary awards, or "premiums," available in each division to arouse interest in the exhibits. The 1887 premium list emphasized agricultural advance and self-sufficiency, and offered awards in fourteen divisions ranging from horses and mules to works-of-art. In addition to agricultural displays, horse racing and a baseball and band tournament provided entertainment. The Fair Association underscored the communal mood of the occasion by inviting participants to take advantage of the "beautiful camp grounds," complete "with the best running water."⁶

For the following two years, fair officials attempted to boost attendance and raise the quality of exhibits. To solicit participation in the event, the Whitman County Fair Association advertised an increase in premiums, from a total of \$5,442 in 1887 to \$7,000 in 1888. It dropped the entrance fee for agricultural exhibits, and emphasized that the adjoining campgrounds had "plenty of water" for people and livestock. The Association's advertising efforts suggest that admissions fees to these early fairs failed to match the county's expenditures. Indeed, an editorialist proclaimed in the *Commoner* in 1888 that without the "hearty co-operation of the people . . . no fair was ever a thorough success."⁷



Whitman County's exhibit at the 1897 Spokane Fruit Fair, which was awarded first prize for the "finest and most artistically arranged display of fruits, grasses, roots and vegetables." Loryea Photographers, Spokane

Despite diligent effort on the part of the association, the *Commoner's* reporter found that many of the 1888 exhibit divisions were underrepresented. "The display of agricultural implements," the correspondent stated, "was sadly deficient...." Perhaps in an effort to bolster community enthusiasm and spur rivalry, directors voted in 1889 to make the fair an exclusive Whitman County event. Accordingly, premiums were disallowed for all but Whitman County products.⁸

Declining attendance and sliding exhibit quality, sparked by interest in Spokane's first "Industrial Exposition," hurt the fair in 1890. Initially the county resisted invitations from Spokane Exposition management. County commissioners, however, quickly organized a display after a Spokane Exposition official, upon visiting Colfax, emphasized the important commercial opportunity afforded by the Spokane event. "Colfax and Whitman county could make the best agricultural display of any city and county in the state," manager S. T. Skeels declared, "as nowhere in my travels have I seen such yields."

Whitman County's efforts to secure space at the Spokane Industrial Exhibition soon took precedence over the county fair. The county's 1890 exhibit in Spokane was hailed as "the largest" and "most elaborate" agricultural display. Moreover, in spite of pervasive optimism which held that



*Front entrance of Whitman County's exhibit at the Spokane Interstate Fair (1910?)
Paige Photographers, Spokane*

Whitman reigned as Washington's "banner agricultural county," the early years of the 1890s brought depression to agriculture nationally.¹⁰ Stricken by the panic of 1893, Whitman County farmers found that low wheat prices resulted in surplus grain and high debts.¹¹ Looking for relief, farmers sued creditors for leniency in 1893 and 1894. Contemporary Whitman County historian W. H. Lever labeled these depression years as the community's "darkest period."¹² Saddled with low prices and disappearing markets, Whitman County farms languished and the fair was forgotten. The county did not sponsor another fair until 1895.

Building Years

The gradual revival of the farm economy led to new proposals in Whitman County to hold another fair. Convinced of the feasibility of such a proposition by Whitman's successful apple display at Spokane's 1894 Fruit Fair, Colfax city leaders and fruit growers met at city hall in July 1895 and reinstated the Fair Association. Colfax businesses promised to support the event with donations of subscriptions and prizes. The *Commoner* cited several reasons for the fair's renewal, including "reviving times," the economic need to draw westward emigration, and the potential use of the county exhibits "to make a mammoth exhibit at Spokane." County officials hoped to secure the \$200 prize for best general exhibit at Spokane's annual fruit exposition.¹³

A new community tradition began with Whitman County's 1895 fair. In an attempt to purge the current event from association with the poorly attended fair of the 1880s, program directors billed the 1895 version as "the first annual" Whitman County Fruit and Agricultural Fair. Subsequent fairs dated themselves from 1895 rather than 1887, the year of Whitman County's actual "first fair."¹⁴

The event sported a new attitude in addition to a new name. Officials emphasized entertainment features rather than agricultural exhibits in the four thousand premium lists which were distributed in Colfax and outlying towns. Significantly, the list revealed a greater amount of prize money available for the separate bicycle, horse, and bull racing events than for individual displays in the agricultural divisions. The fair committee's addition of two new members in August, moreover, revealed the extensive scope of an unprecedented advertising campaign.¹⁵

The efforts of the committee were rewarded in September, as "large crowds" ensured the payment of premiums and defrayed the expenses of transporting exhibits to the Spokane fair. The success of Whitman's "first" fair fueled enthusiasm for the event, and throughout the next fifteen years, it grew in stability and maturity. Though the agricultural emphasis remained, the fair experienced commercial growth, expanding entertainment venues, and attendance increases. Many Colfax businessmen, for example, capitalized on the fair's advertising opportunities. Main Street businesses closed during one weekday in 1896, in order to allow employees to take part in the celebration. Local innkeepers took advantage of fair-bound visitors by raising room prices. In fact, the *Commoner* reported in 1902, this effort to "get rich quick by charging exorbitant prices," remained the only "bad feature" of the annual fair. The reporter lamented that the unreasonable rates sparked "severe criticism" and injured Colfax's hospitable reputation.¹⁶

As Colfax businesses began to rely on the fair for increased sales revenue, entertainment became an important feature of the event's appeal. A baby show provided entertainment for the first time in 1897, and in 1898 programmers added hot air balloon ascensions and trapeze stunts. In 1899 fair directors became so desperate in their search for unique entertainment that they made careless choices. The heavily advertised "war dances" failed to materialize because the Nez Perce Indians which were scheduled to appear were "all off hunting in the mountains" and could not be located. The substitute balloon ascension, moreover, ended in disaster when the balloon caught fire during inflation and was virtually destroyed.¹⁷

Fair directors continued to experience problems with scheduled entertainment. Whitman's first carnival, a 1903 attraction, succeeded in drawing crowds but ended on a sour note when the county sheriff exposed the



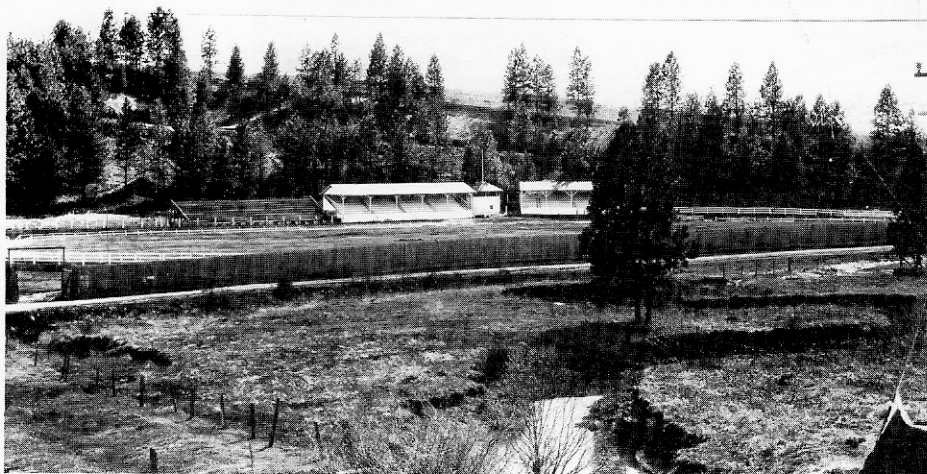
Whitman County's fruit and vegetable exhibit at the Spokane Interstate Fair (1910?). Paige Photographers, Spokane

“swamp girl who eats mud” act as a “fake.” Authorities revealed the identity of the act’s star, “Naughty Dora,” as that of a thirteen-year-old African-American male who had been forcibly taken from his Spokane home. The managers of the attraction were subsequently arrested for kidnapping.¹⁸

Perhaps in an effort to offer more reliable entertainment, fair management advertised a “real wedding” as an attraction in 1908. The Whitman-born bride and groom were married on the racetrack in front of the grand stand by the local Methodist minister. A procession of “flower-bedeked automobiles” escorted the bridal party to the racetrack, where they received a \$50 check on behalf of the Fair Association.¹⁹

In addition to unique entertainment features, Association managers used several promotional techniques to increase interest in the fair between 1895 and 1909. The first “School Children’s Day,” held in 1901, provided a special train for students from Tekoa, Farmington, Garfield, and Elberton, and resulted in the highest single-day attendance numbers for that year. Colfax students and the high school band met the train, and the children then formed a procession down Main Street to the fair grounds.²⁰

The 1901 fair also included a special invitation to Spokane merchants to meet their agricultural producers in Whitman County. One Spokane man



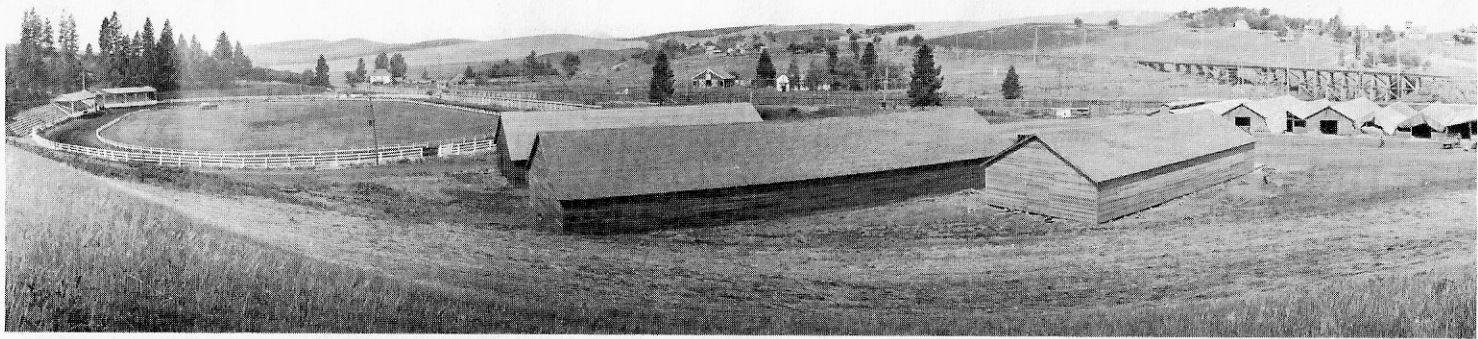
View of Garfield fairgrounds, date unknown.

who took part in the excursion noted that the Spokane representatives were treated “royally” and praised the benefits of the trip. “The producers learn to know us and feel that they do not ship to entirely disinterested people,” H. J. Shinn surmised, “and we learn to respect the labor of the man who produces.” Eastern buyers also attended the fair, according to the *Commoner*, and were “well-entertained.”²¹

In 1907 Whitman fair officials created “Grange day” and invited local Granges to occupy a special role in the festivities. Organized in September 1889, the Washington State Grange gained momentum throughout the first decade of the twentieth century as the Progressive reform movement took hold in the Pacific Northwest. The Grange’s support of Populism and free silver during the 1890s and of temperance during the Progressive Era made it rural Washington’s voice of change. While the invitation to local Granges illustrated the fair board’s appeal to prevailing political values in order to draw attendance, the acceptance of seven local Grange chapters established the fair as a platform for political and social sentiment.²²

The Fair Association also utilized an increasing public relations budget to advertise heavily in local papers and to distribute fliers around town. An imposing, quarter-page *Commoner* advertisement in 1899 announced free admission as an attendance incentive. A 1907 advertisement covered an entire page of the *Commoner* and outlined the events of each day — “Opening Day,” “Grange Day,” “Whitman County Day,” “Spokane Day,” “Colfax Day,” “Everybody’s Day” — and announced “special reduced rates on all railroads.”²³

An attendance explosion between 1895 and 1910 rewarded Fair Association members for their efforts in advertising and in procuring interest-



View of Garfield fairgrounds, August 31, 1926.



View of Whitman-Latah County Fair from the railroad tracks, September 3, 1926.

ing entertainment features. Whitman's 1896 fair attendance — a record-breaking 4,500 people — far exceeded that of the previous year. The fair drew a crowd of 6,000 in 1898, and, despite poor weather conditions in 1899, attracted between 5,000 and 10,000 people on Saturday alone. By 1908, attendance surpassed 10,000 and the fair for the first time paid its expenses in full with ticket receipts, which totalled over 4,000 dollars. The 1908 "Children's Day" attracted over 4,000 students, thus breaking all previous records for that theme day.²⁴

Rebuilding Years

A devastating spring flood in 1910 threatened the advances of the fair's previous decade. The March flood, caused by unusual snow accumulation, excessive run-off, and heavy rains, swept away Colfax homes, destroyed bridges, and maimed rail lines. The *Commoner* reported damages to private residents and businesses at \$172,800. Extreme damage to the fairgrounds necessitated rebuilding the exhibit pavilion, horse stalls, cattle shed, hog shed, poultry shed, race track fence, and hitching racks. Completed in August, the improvements increased exhibit space and for the first time provided a "permanent" water supply, suitable for drinking and sprinkling.²⁵

With larger, more convenient facilities, the Whitman County fair began its third decade poised for growth and commercialization. The years between 1910 and 1920 witnessed a deterioration of the family-oriented, exhibit-based fair of the early 1900s. The introduction of Henry Ford's mass-produced, relatively inexpensive Model-T automobile in 1913 impacted the leisure habits of Pacific Northwesterners and Whitman county residents. In 1910, Washington state registered 157.1 persons per motor vehicle; by 1920, there were 7.9 people per automobile. Swelling private ownership of automobiles forced the Whitman County Fair Association to offer amusements which could compete with entertainments offered in nearby urban areas, such as Spokane. Throughout the decade, fair promoters increasingly relied on sensational acts — balloon ascensions, airplane stunts, carnivals, and racing events — to draw crowds.²⁶

With the demand for more stimulating entertainment came an unprecedented emphasis on gambling. In 1910, agricultural exhibits clearly took a secondary position to horse racing, which the *Commoner* noted was "better than usual." Carnivals established their popularity mostly on the appeal of "games of chance." The Parker Carnival, with its twenty-five railroad cars, encompassed the largest attraction to Whitman County's 1912 fair.²⁷

Sensational acts hired by the Fair Association often represented a gamble in themselves. As fascination with hot air balloons gave way to a fixation with "flying machines," the Fair Association spent significant funds



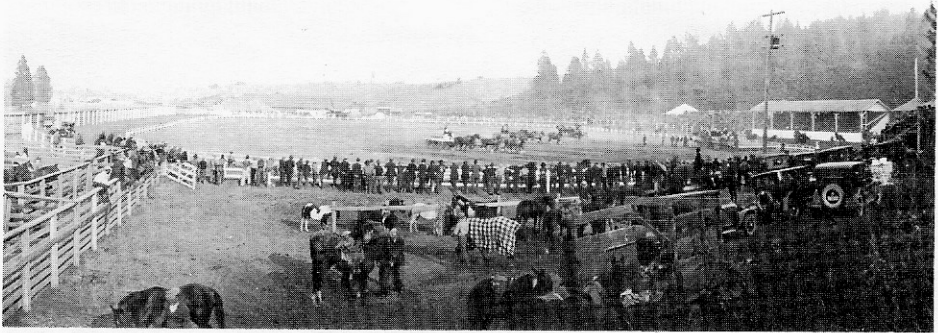
Washington Governor Roland Hartley speaking to grandstand at the Whitman-Latah County Fair, Garfield, October 8, 1925.

to draw the best shows. The 1912 fair highlighted the first “aeroplane flight” seen in Colfax, but an accident put a premature end to the festivities. Adverse air currents caused the plane to lose elevation and crash, though the pilot remained unharmed. The same pilot, John Bryant, was killed later that year during an exhibition in Victoria, British Columbia.²⁸

The 1914 fair offered a plethora of aviation marvels — stunts by the “boy aviator,” balloon ascensions, parachute jumps — but again revealed the fickle reliability of the sport. The balloon crashed into the electric railroad’s trolley wires, and though no injuries were sustained, the crises forced fair managers to transport experts to the scene.²⁹

Commercialization of the fair clearly benefitted Colfax businessmen. Main Street establishments realized that cooperation with the Fair Association meant sales revenue. In 1912, the Fair Association used business streets to house additional attractions. Merchants wooed fairgoers with enticing advertisements, such as that of Lippitt Brothers Department store. The full-page advertisement in the *Commoner* extended a hearty welcome to “out-of-town” visitors, urging fairgoers to “leave your parcels here, use our phones, meet your friends, and enjoy the comfortable rest room.” William Lippitt, co-owner of Lippitt Brothers department store and former Colfax mayor, moreover, maintained membership on the fair’s board of directors for several years, serving as president in 1917.³⁰

Not all Whitman County residents, however, were as enthusiastic about the commercialization of the fair. The quality of agricultural exhibits and



View of Whitman County Fair, Garfield, October 8, 1925.

the small-town community spirit of early Whitman fairs eroded as entertainment venues became more sensational and crowds swelled. The demise of the fair's agricultural emphasis reflected a growing trend in American society. Though the decade witnessed unprecedented prosperity for Whitman County farmers — between 1911 and 1919 Washington harvested more than forty million bushels of wheat per year, compared with only twenty six million per year between 1895 and 1910 — rural lifestyles seemed imperiled. American society was becoming less rural. Indeed, as early as 1870, non-agricultural jobs employed more Americans than did those related to land. Small farms disappeared while other farmers consolidated their holdings. In 1910, Whitman County listed 3,096 farms with an average acreage of 383.4. In 1920, the county listed 2,957 farms, but the average size had increased to 423.6 acres.³¹

City life attracted thousands of young people who, a decade earlier, would have stayed on the farm. Some Whitman residents feared not only the county fair's loss of traditional values, but also the "loss of their children to the cities" and the destruction of emotional ties to the tilling of land which had sustained farm families for centuries. Within the disparity between financial prosperity and emotional instability, Boys' and Girls' Clubs emerged and took over the agricultural exhibits which had once been the mainstay of the county fair.³²

The passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 created the apparatus within which programs designed "to instill into the young people respect for farming and home making" could be organized. The bill established financial support for the Cooperative Extension Service, an educational program involving the United States Food and Drug Administration (USDA), land-grant universities, and local governments. The Smith-Lever Act rep-



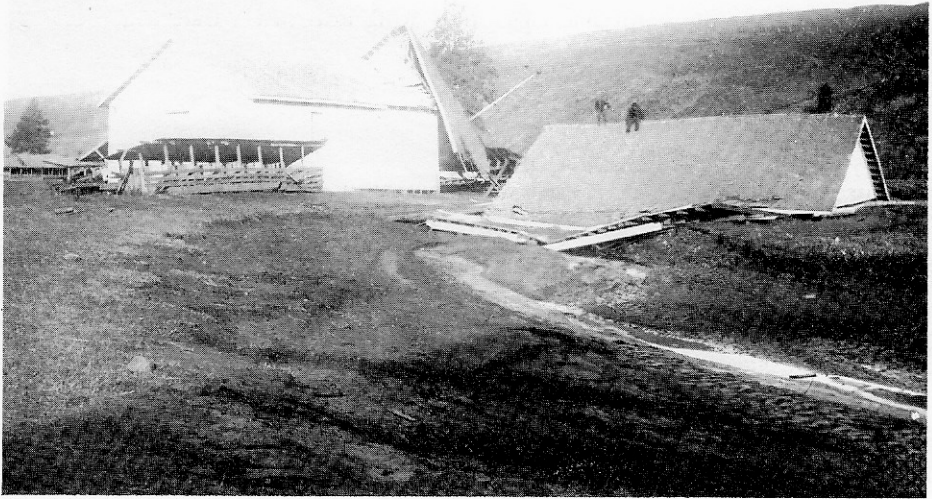
Baseball team performing at the Whitman-Latah County Fair, Garfield, circa 1926.

resented an innovative legislative attempt at state-federal cooperation in public education, characteristic of the Progressive Era.³³

Extension youth club involvement in the Whitman County fair coincided with United States entry into World War I. Increased demand for food and fiber production during the war mobilized Extension and club work; between 1916 and 1918, club membership escalated from 169,000 to over 500,000. In 1917 the first Boys' and Girls' Industrial Fair was held in conjunction with the Whitman County "Racing Meet." Because of decreased appropriations and "the drain upon the people for Red Cross and Liberty Bond donations," fair directors left agricultural displays to youth clubs. Exhibits and horse racing events attracted large crowds, including many of the 300 men called to Colfax by the local Selective Service Board for draft examinations.³⁴

The war years altered the fair in many ways. Wartime stress, rationing, and global travel contributed to the worldwide spread of Spanish influenza, which in 1918 closed the Whitman County fair and other public gatherings. The Spanish flu killed more residents of the Pacific Northwest than the war itself.³⁵

Wartime efforts of youth clubs exacerbated the split between agricultural exhibits and racing attractions. In the years following 1917, the Whitman County fair became increasingly fragmented. The 1919 fair featured a "Wild West" show and the talents of locally-born Hollywood stuntman Yakima Canutt, in addition to racing, balloon ascensions, and airplane



View of flood devastation caused to Colfax fairground buildings, 1910. A. E. King Photographers, Colfax.

flights. The attraction of Boys' and Girls' Club exhibits paled in comparison. Similarly, the 1920 fair placed greater emphasis on racing than ever before, with Colfax businessmen pledging 3,000 dollars for cash prizes, while the *Commoner* failed to mention the inclusion of youth club exhibits.³⁶

The Roaring Twenties

By 1920 the Whitman County fair had become a horse racing meet and entertainment extravaganza, while the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, also known as 4-H after 1918, took sole possession of agricultural displays. The excesses of fair entertainment, however, worried some Whitman County residents. In the wake of congressional approval of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, moral fervor ran deep, particularly in rural areas. The Washington State Grange, for example, had long been a fierce advocate of temperance and Prohibition.³⁷

The moralistic spirit of Prohibition evidently influenced critics of carnival entertainment. A *Commoner* editorial entitled "The Effect of Visiting Carnivals" leveled serious charges against fair directors for inviting "gamblers, gambling devices, and lewed [sic] women" to Colfax under the auspices of the county fair. "The disastrous results of one of these carnivals in a town for a week," the editorialist lamented, "cannot be eradicated by the best efforts of all the churches for a whole year."³⁸

In response to such complaints, Colfax business leaders formed a committee in 1921 to plan an “entirely new line of amusement” intended to replace the “old-fashioned county fair.” The fruition of their efforts, a week of “jollification” entitled the “La La Palouser,” delivered attractions designed to “meet the approval of both young and old”: dancing, boxing, baseball, bucking-horse contests, a street parade, and a Wild West show. Eighty local businesses lent financial backing to the event, thus allowing the commercial committee to offer an Overland Automobile as reward for winning the auto contest. Ten thousand people participated in the La La Palouser’s three-day celebration, six thousand of whom attended Saturday’s round-up at the fairgrounds. The *Commoner* quoted old-timers who stated that there were more people on Colfax streets that Saturday than had “ever visited the city in one day.”³⁹

The phenomenal success of Whitman County’s first La La Palouser fueled enough support for two more years of the event. The similar extravaganza of 1922 paid its expenses with admissions receipts, which totalled 3,318 dollars for two days, and generated a surplus balance of 314 dollars. In 1923, however, store owners who had originally sanctioned the celebration complained that concession booths, or “hamburg hotels,” and the dance hall’s rural location drew business away from Colfax’s central commercial district. Notably, the small 4-H club livestock exhibits attracted crowds, and the *Commoner* declared that “future success of the La La Palouser depends upon the agricultural and livestock exhibits.” The youth “who brings to the show a pig, calf or other animal,” one disgruntled farmer remarked, “must be given as good a prize for his work as is now given by the management to some youth who rides a steer.”⁴⁰

Not surprisingly, a movement to reinstate the county fair, led by farmers, livestock breeders, and agriculturalists, surfaced in 1924. The Whitman County Farm Bureau urged that local farmers needed a place to exhibit and advertise farm produce. The Bureau blamed racing advocates, who wrongly dismissed agricultural exhibits as nothing more than a bunch of “big pumpkins,” for the demise of the original county fair.⁴¹

In response to the Bureau’s demands, the Whitman County Fair Association reorganized and elected new officers in May 1924. The Association chose Garfield as the fair’s permanent site after Garfield representatives offered board members free use of their grounds, buildings, grandstands, and racetrack, and an 1,000 dollar bonus for premiums. Garfield’s proposal appealed to the Fair Association because at the time the organization lacked funds or county assistance. Colfax Chamber of Commerce’s own donation of free use of Colfax’s old fair grounds came too late to dissuade county fair directors from choosing Garfield.⁴²

Garfield housed the Whitman County Fair from 1924 to 1929. Agricultural and 4-H club exhibits formed the focus of these well-attended fairs.

Even the revival of Colfax's La La Palouser in 1926 did little to dampen interest in the county fair. In 1926, Latah County representatives joined forces with Whitman County fair directors and Garfield's celebration became the Whitman-Latah County Agricultural Fair. The premium list of this first joint endeavor declared as its purpose the promotion of "a better Palouse Country" by "stimulating community life" through "healthy competition for first honors ... between the various districts." Washington Governor Roland Hartley's visit to the 1926 fair christened the cooperative venture, which continued until 1929.⁴³

Depression Years

The Great Depression of the 1930s interrupted the staging of Whitman County's fairs once again. Residents of agricultural communities in the Pacific Northwest were particularly hard hit; the average income of some dropped by 50 percent between 1929 and 1932. Declining tax revenues forced state and local governments to cut budgets, and the Cooperative Extension Service incurred deep reductions in state and federal appropriations. Despite budgetary constraints, 4-H membership continued to rise as staff positions were replaced by unemployed volunteers. By 1936, national 4-H membership exceeded one million. New Deal programs, such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) of 1935, encouraged Extension to sustain more farm programs. To do this, Extension received congressional appropriations between 1935 and 1939 which amounted to twelve million dollars.⁴⁴

4-H youth clubs were therefore able to sponsor small fairs throughout the Depression. Whitman County held its first 4-H club fair in 1930, which included the exhibits of two-hundred participants, ranging from livestock to sewing. By 1931, Whitman County's 4-H fair involved three-hundred club members and drew an impressive attendance of 2,000 people. In a 1932 edition of Colfax's *Gazette*, Colfax merchants saluted the efforts of 4-H club members in a full-page advertisement. "4-H club fairs," the article proclaimed, "are vital to the development of the future farmers and homemakers and to the best citizenship." Clearly, the community welcomed the traditional rural values represented by 4-H during these troubled economic times.⁴⁵

Though 4-H exhibits provided an anchor for the community during the stormy, early years of the Depression, a call for renewal of the county fair came in 1938. Twenty representative businessmen, ranchers, 4-H leaders and farmers met with county commissioners in February and named a committee, headed by L. L. Bruning, to manage the rebirth of the county's fair, to be held in Colfax. Excluding horse racing, rodeos, and carnival attractions, the committee decided that 4-H exhibits would form the nucleus of the fair. Indeed, the 1938 fair, with its emphasis on agricultural



Circus located on the old Whitman-Latab county fairgrounds, Garfield, June 1949.

displays, harkened back to Whitman's simpler 1890s fairs. Washington Governor Clarence D. Martin spoke to crowds at the rodeo grandstand after heading a parade down Main Street. Future Farmers of America (FFA) and Camp Fire Girls joined 4-H clubs in the battle for best display.⁴⁶

The transition represented by the 1938 fair's traditional flavor set a precedent for future celebrations, proving successful in 1939, 1940, and 1941. The 1939 fair doubled the exhibits of the previous year, and by 1941 Colfax Chamber of Commerce officials urged the City Council to finance the construction of a community building at Schmuck Park, in Colfax, which could be used to house mushrooming exhibits.⁴⁷

World War II

American involvement in World War II postponed the community building's construction and brought the county fair to yet another standstill. Department of Defense Transportation officials canceled the 1942 fair because of the need to restrict automobile use and to ration gasoline and tires. The cancellation also allowed city officials to return the fair's 1942 appropriation of \$2,400 to the expense fund.⁴⁸

Fair manager A. F. Harms, however, encouraged 4-H members to continue Victory Garden projects and vital food production and preservation activities. 4-H clubs throughout the nation embraced the slogan "Food for Freedom," and younger club members took on added responsibility as the war drew older family members away from the farm. 4-H clubs, moreover, again carried the exhibit role of the county fair, and

provided a source of economical entertainment. Admission-free, one-day Junior 4-H fairs held in 1943 and 1944 offered gymnastic exhibitions, pet parades, and minstrel shows in addition to booths which demonstrated the importance of wartime food production. Exhibit entrance in these fairs was not limited to club members; local youth club chapters invited "all boys and girls of the county under the age of twenty one" to participate. The 4-H events also provided a platform for patriotic unity. The 1943 Junior Club fair featured an appearance by the Navy Victory Truck, on which was mounted "the gun that sank the first Japanese submarine" following Pearl Harbor. The 4-H clubs therefore maintained a continuity for agricultural displays which would allow the Whitman County Fair Association to continue its efforts following the war.⁴⁹

Over a half-century of Whitman County fairs, agricultural exhibits, and fall celebrations mark a pattern of transition within the agricultural community. County fairs experienced numerous setbacks — poor attendance, natural disaster, moral censorship, economic hardship, wartime sacrifice — but Whitman County residents expressed the importance of the fair's role in the community by continually reinstating it. The emergence of 4-H youth groups in the century's second decade, moreover, provided an element of stability. The clubs maintained agricultural displays during periods when the Fair Association chose to deemphasize farm exhibits. The fair became a barometer of the social and economic climate, declining in times of financial despair, expanding in times of prosperity, and reflecting social concerns such as the decline of traditional farm values and Prohibition. Ultimately, the Whitman county fair served as a microcosm of fifty years of community and county development.



NOTES

1. John Fahey, *The Inland Empire: Unfolding Years, 1879-1929* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 83.
2. Keith Williams, "The Agricultural History of Latah County and the Palouse: An Overview and Three Case Studies" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Washington State University, 1984), 24.
3. Fahey, *The Inland Empire*, 27, 39.
4. *An Illustrated History of Whitman County, State of Washington* (W. H. Lever, 1901), 117. This is the accepted contemporary account of Whitman County's early years.

5. (Colfax) *Commoner*, 8 April 1887; 15 July 1887, 5:3; 2 September 1887, 5:3; 16 September 1887, 5:4.
6. *Ibid.*, 7 October 1887, 5:3; 14 October 1887, 5:3; 16 September 1887, 7:4.
7. *Ibid.*, 16 September 1887, 7:4; 14 September 1888, 4:4; 21 September 1888, 5:4.
8. *Ibid.*, 12 October 1888, 5:3; 2 August 1889, 5:6.
9. Spokane's first fair, held in 1887, became an industrial exposition in 1890 and a fruit fair in 1894. In 1901, Spokane's fair merged to become an interstate fair. Spokane's fairs were consistently some of the largest in the state. See Fahey, *The Inland Empire*, 83. *Commoner*, 12 September 1890, 5:2; Lever, *Illustrated History of Whitman County*, 125.
10. *Commoner*, 7 November 1890, 2:3.
11. Fahey, *Inland Empire*, 16.
12. Lever, *Illustrated History of Whitman County*, 123, 125.
13. *Commoner*, 28 June 1895, 9:4; 12 July 1895, 3:5.
14. *Ibid.*, 27 September 1895, 7:1.
15. *Ibid.*, 30 August 1895, 3:1.
16. *Ibid.*, 27 September 1895, 7:1; 9 October 1896, 7:1; 24 October 1902, 3:4.
17. *Ibid.*, 24 September 1897, 2:1; 28 October 1898, 1:2; 20 October 1899, 1:2.
18. *Ibid.*, 16 October 1903, 1:4.
19. *Ibid.*, 4 September 1908, 1:4.
20. *Ibid.*, 4 October 1901, 1:4.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 20 September 1907, 1:4; Norman H. Clark, *The Dry Years: Prohibition and Social Change in Washington* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 47.
23. *Commoner*, 8 September 1899, 2:3; 4 October 1907, 4:2.
24. *Ibid.*, 9 October 1896, 7:1; 28 October 1898, 1:2; 20 October 1899, 1:2; 9 October 1908, 1:2.
25. *Ibid.*, 11 March 1910, 1:2; 19 August 1910, 1:2.
26. Carlos A. Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 290-293; Fahey, *The Inland Empire*, 83, 84.
27. *Commoner*, 7 October 1910, 1:2; 11 October 1912, 1:3.
28. *Ibid.*, 25 October 1912, 1:3; 26 September 1913, 1:4.
29. *Ibid.*, 9 October 1914, 1:4.

30. *Ibid.*, 11 October 1912, 1:3; 2 October 1914, 12:2; Whitman County Fair Premium Lists, 1914, 1917, Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections [MASC], Holland Library, Washington State University; Edith E. Erickson, *Colfax: 100 Plus* (Colfax: Privately Printed, 1981), 89.
31. Fahey, *Inland Empire*, 56; Thomas and Marilyn Wessel, *4-H: An American Idea, 1900-1980* (Chevy Chase, Maryland: National 4-H Council, 1982), 1; Erickson, *Colfax: 100 Plus*, 33.
32. Wessel, *4-H*, 1.
33. *Ibid.*, 24, 25, 331; Premium List of the Boys' and Girls' Industrial Fair, 1919, MASC.
34. Wessel, *4-H*, 25; Premium List of the Whitman County Fair, 1917, MASC; *Commoner*, 12 October 1917, 1:3.
35. 500,000 to 700,000 Americans died of Spanish influenza while the combat fatality total was 50,000. See Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 283-284; *Commoner*, 11 October 1918, 1:2.
36. *Commoner*, 26 September 1919, 1:6; 17 September 1920, 1:6.
37. Wessel, *4-H*, 341; Clark, *The Dry Years*, 148.
38. *Commoner*, 1 July 1921, 2:2.
39. *Ibid.*, 22 July 1921, 1:3; 26 August 1921, 10:2; 9 September 1921, 1:6.
40. *Ibid.*, 8 September 1922, 1:5; 14 September 1923, 1:1.
41. *Ibid.*, 28 March 1924, 1:3.
42. *Ibid.*, 30 May 1924, 1:6; 13 June 1924, 1:2.
43. *Ibid.*, 16 July 1926, 1:6; 3 September 1926, 1:5; Premium List of the Whitman-Latah County Fair, 1926, MASC.
44. Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 302; Wessel, *4-H*, 48.
45. (Colfax) *Gazette*, 10 October 1930, 1:3; 4 September 1931, 1:4; 2 September 1932, 4..
46. *Ibid.*, 25 February 1938, 1:3; 4 March 1938, 1:6; 23 September 1938, 1:5.
47. *Ibid.*, 20 September 1940; 1:4; 25 July 1941, 1:6.
48. *Ibid.*, 26 June 1942, 1:3; Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 332.
49. *Ibid.*, 24 September 1943, 1:7; 22 September 1944, 1:5.