



Bunchgrass Historian

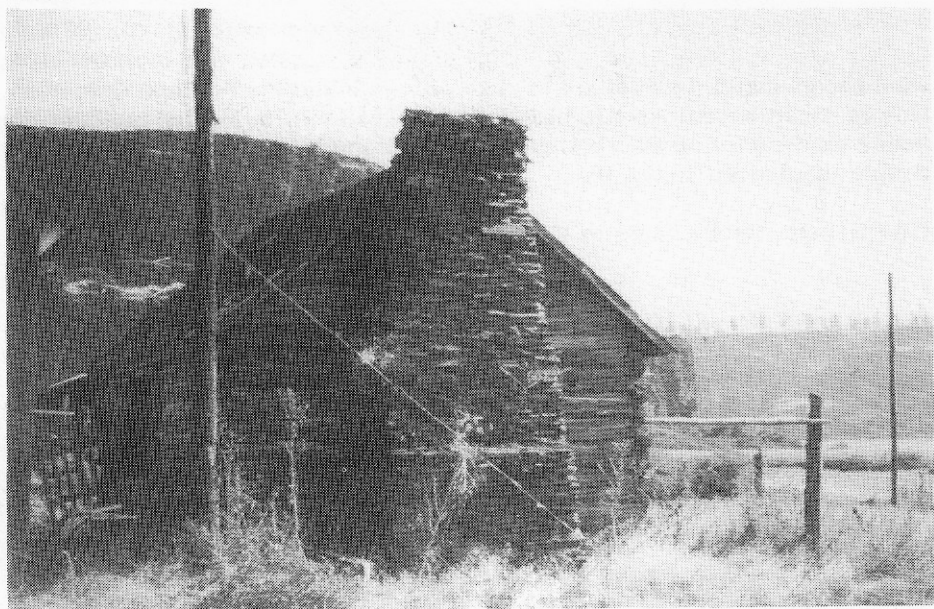
Volume 3, No. 4

Winter, 1975

The Homesteaders Come To The Palouse

They came to Whitman county mostly after a brief stay in the Oregon country; drawn by the promise of cheap land, wide open spaces and soil so fertile a crop failure was unheard of.

The first Homestead Law had been passed in 1862. At first it was viewed as a way to make money for the government by selling large tracts of western lands to investors. But farmers soon pressured the government into selling small portions of the land to homesteaders for a low price. The first homestead claim was granted in 1863 in Nebraska and that started the movement to settle the West.



—Courtesy Leona Tuft

This cabin was built in 1882 on the Harry Bach place at Hole in the Ground. Fireplace was added in 1900's.



Published quarterly in March, June, September and December during the calendar year by the Whitman County Historical Society, at P.O. Box 447, Pullman, Washington 99163 to further an interest in a rich and wonderful heritage by sharing memories of those days of early settlement in the bunchgrass country. Subscription rates are three dollars the calendar year.

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The homesteader's first concern once he had found his land, was that of shelter. Little of Whitman county was timbered so a wagon trip to the Moscow Mountains, the Elberton area or the Clearwater drainage was necessary. The trees were cut and trimmed and either floated down the creeks or rivers to the building site or were loaded on the wagon and hauled home. There they were peeled and notched ready to be lifted into place. Later the cracks were chinked with clay, the door and windows installed and the new home was ready to live in.

These cabin homes were sturdy buildings and many have withstood the rigors of time to this day. Some of them, which still stand in Whitman county, are shown on the following pages.□

"Houses were built of boards, double boxed and battened. Cracks were caulked on the inside, narrow strips of cloth were pasted over this, the walls were papered with the **Pacific Christian Advocate** and the **Portland Oregonian**. One of these houses stands near Colfax, built in 1878. Before building our house we lived in the old Perkins House. Mr. and Mrs. Perkins were the first couple married at Colfax."

—Told by the Pioneer's Vol. 3, 1933

(The Roberts family came to Colfax in 1878)

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R. C. McCrosky, of California, has purchased 40 acres adjoining town on the north, from Mr. Guffith, and will build a fine residence upon it.

—Garfield Enterprise, Aug. 10, 1888

Note: This old house was recently placed on the National Register of Historic Places. —Ed.

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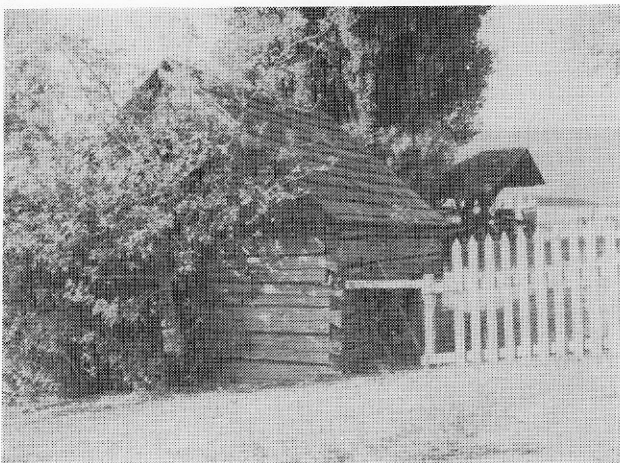
Farm for Rent: A farm, two miles from Palouse, of 107 acres, including dwelling, barn, well and orchard, for \$1.50 per acre. Cash in advance.

—Palouse City News, 1901



The Kelley log cabin is located three miles southeast of Oakesdale on State Highway 27. Built in 1872 by John F. Kelley and since maintained by the family. It is in excellent condition.

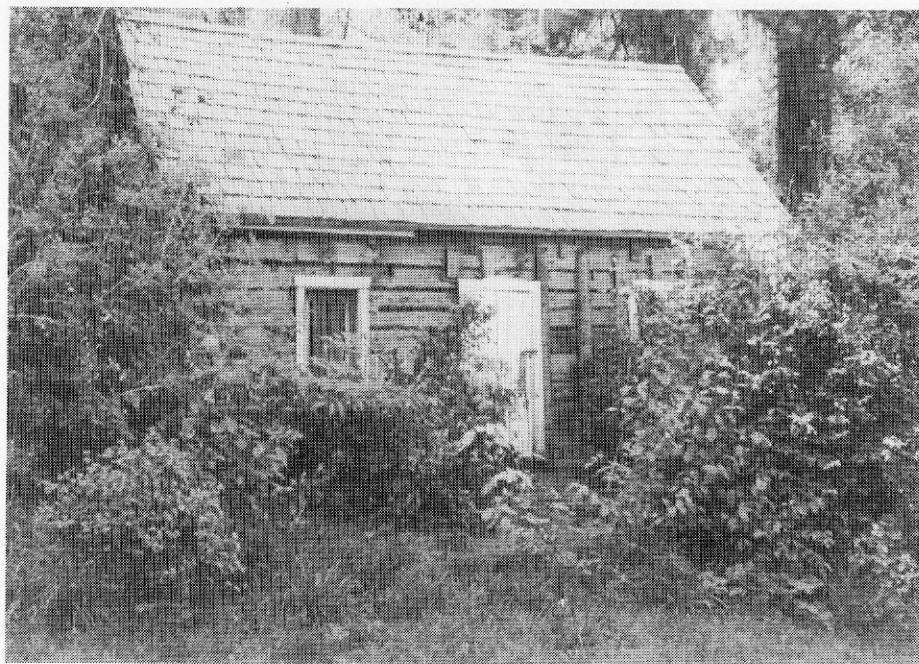
The Myers' log cabin built by Nate Myers about 1879. The logs were floated down the Clearwater and Snake rivers and hauled up the Old Hill road by wagon. It is located on the James McMakin property near the rim of the Snake river canyon southwest of Pullman. This cabin is to be restored.



The Maiden Lane log cabin in Pullman is larger and well preserved and it is thought to have been built at a much later date than the others.



This cabin was built by Thomas Shoffen in 1875. It can be seen from highway 195 just north of Uniontown in a field to the east. It was later sided with sawn lumber from the Palouse mill.



The Perkins' log cabin in Colfax, built in 1870, was the first built in that city. This cabin is to be restored by the Whitman County Historical Society.

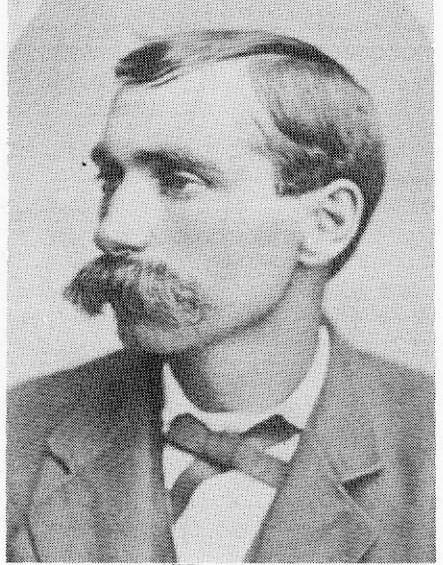
That's My Land If I Can Get It

As told by Mrs. Lucy Downen

My parents were the Moody F. Jordans from Maine. Father traveled from Maine to California in 1878. Then back to Maine in 1880. In 1881, he married my mother, sold his home and moved again to California. He began his search for land traveling to the Pacific Northwest. On April 30, 1883, he got off the train at Sprague and walked to Rock Creek. He stopped here and looked out over the land seeing the creek as water, the brush trees of alder, birch, poplar and willow as wood, and the bunchgrass as hay. And he said to himself, "That's my land if I can get it."

At Colfax he found there was a homestead available and a half section of railroad land joining it so he bought that. Father lived in the cabin the first winter and Mother stayed in California. He built a nice house the next year, hauling lumber from Elberton for the new home. Mother joined him in October of 1884. They lived on the ranch that winter. Mother opened a dress making shop in Sprague in 1885, and operated the business until 1897. I was born at the ranch in 1889. My brother Harry was born in 1896.

Father kept buying land through the years. He paid as little as 75c an acre for much of it, buying only 40 to 60 acres at a time. In this way he finally acquired the total of 2,500 acres. Four hundred and fifty acres of the original holdings are still in the family, but is farmed now by David Johnstone.



MOODY F. JORDAN

Father raised cattle, horses and dogs. He drove the cattle to Spokane for marketing. His Percheron horses were shipped to St. Maries for use in the logging industry. The Greyhound dogs were used in hunting coyotes. They were outstanding in their endurance and speed. They would run a coyote until his tongue was hanging out and by then the horseback riders could catch up for a telling shot. At that time there were so many coyotes roaming the hills the stockmen hunted them to stay in business. My father later began to farm the land, raising grain.

In 1897 we moved back to the ranch because a schoolhouse had been moved nearer our place. There were several schools in the area; Shyrock, Eaton (Alki) and the Columbia school. Sometimes there was a month of school and sometimes six months. When my father first settled on our place there were a lot of whitewashed rocks down on the creek bank. They had once been the foundation of the first building for education which everyone called the "college" in all good humor. It had been built in the very earliest years of settlement in the area.

Father served as deputy sheriff of the western part of the county in the 1890's. He spent much of that time chasing cattle rustlers. There were almost as many cattle rustlers as there were coyotes. In 1893, he helped other law officers

in the area run down Alfred Symes, a notorious rustler who had just killed Sheriff Conley of Lincoln county. I was a small child at the time, but I remember how frightened I became when I overheard the men talking about the arrest. Someone said, "We got the confession out of him, but he threatened to kill Jordan." Symes served time in Walla Walla, but after he was released from prison he eventually became a preacher.

The rustlers had used a cave in the big cove between Ewan, the gravel pit and the Palouse river, as a hideout. The cave is so high up, a rope ladder had to be used to get to it.

I became a school teacher and taught the Turner school in 1907-08. At that time, a district had to have six months of school guaranteed for one term before the county would support the school. Mrs. Turner's sister, Daisy Hodgins, had property along the railroad right of way with a 10 X 12 ft. homestead cabin on it. Daisy and I lived and I taught school in that cabin for six months. It was quite an experience and very different from the teaching facilities available today. The cabin was furnished with a table, a laundry stove to cook on, six seats for



The Jordans in front of the family home in their Perry car. Greyhound dogs in foreground.

pupils, a curtain around one corner where we hung our clothes and a bed. The quarters were cramped. The ten pupils were crowded into six seats and the bed was taken down each morning and set outside to make more room. A blackboard was nailed up on one wall. Daisy boarded me, even split the wood and carried water from the Turner place. I taught the 3 R's to all grades for that six-month term of school for fifty dollars a month. On Friday night, Daisy went to the Turner home for the weekend and father came for me.

During the time I was teaching at the Turner school, the new railroad was being built through the area and the construction was going on on both sides of the schoolhouse. The railroad workers often walked from either end to the middle of the job to visit and frequently met near our cabin. We would hear them sit down on our doorstep and the talk and laughter would go on for hours. Our

bedtime came early, so we would lay there listening, but not understanding one word of the Greek or Italian that was being spoken outside.

There were frequent labor disputes during the construction period and during one of these the men went on strike and were determined to keep anyone from passing through the work section. My father had been warned that the men were in a very ugly mood and was concerned for Daisy and me. He was determined to get us out of there, but when he approached the railroad men, they refused to let him pass. He always carried a .30-.30 rifle and when he displayed this weapon and told them his destination was only to the schoolhouse to get the girls, they parted and let him through.

In the summer of 1908, I taught school in the dance hall at the foot of Cliff House Hill to help get a school established there.

The town of Ewan was first settled in 1912. In 1913, my brother and I bought the hardware store from Ed McNall. We operated the store for five years and then sold it to Clyde Linville. Harry also had an insurance business.

I married a school teacher, Chester P. Downen, a native of Asotin county. We both taught school for several years and then he went into the military service during World War I, making it from buck private to captain by his boot straps. I ran the farm and hardware during the war. Harry also went into the service eventually and served in the Spruce Division.

When Chester first returned after the war, he worked at the warehouse in Ewan. Later he took a job with the Department of Agriculture, first with the county, then the state, and finally the federal department in Washington D.C. At one time he had eleven states he supervised. He had to quit the job in Washington D.C. because of the terrible humidity in the summers. His health broke. We still had the original homestead of four hundred and fifty acres, but we leased the land and moved to Pullman where he worked for the Department of Agriculture again. We moved back to the ranch after a year.

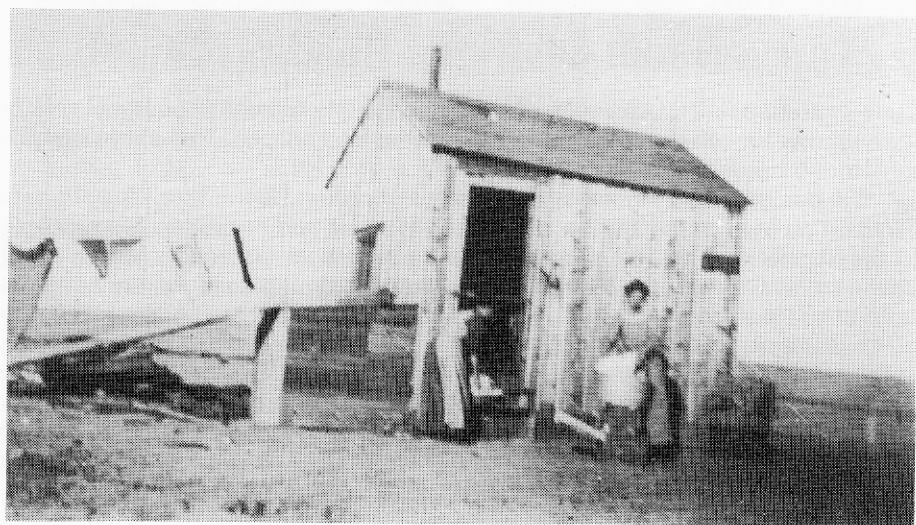
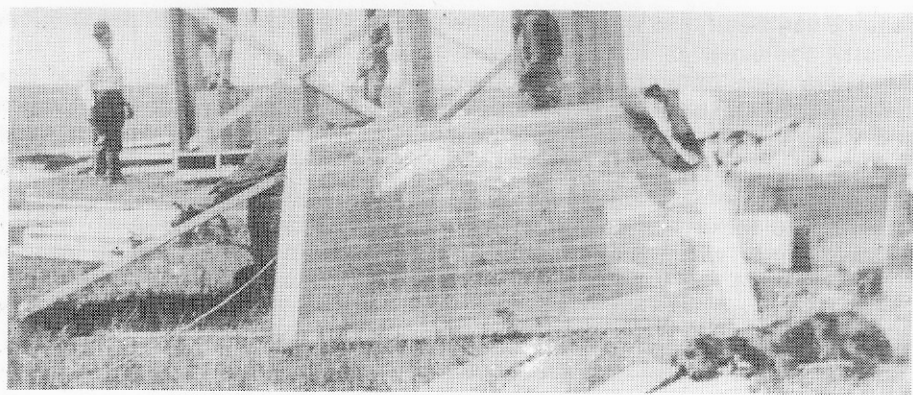
During World War II, our daughter, Dorothy, enlisted in the Waves, our son, Robert, who was lame, could not enlist, so he came back to the farm and raised them some food.□

The Sawmill Changes Building Styles

The advent of sawmills in Whitman county brought about the use of sawn lumber for construction of the later homestead shacks. This simplified the construction work, being easier to handle than logs.

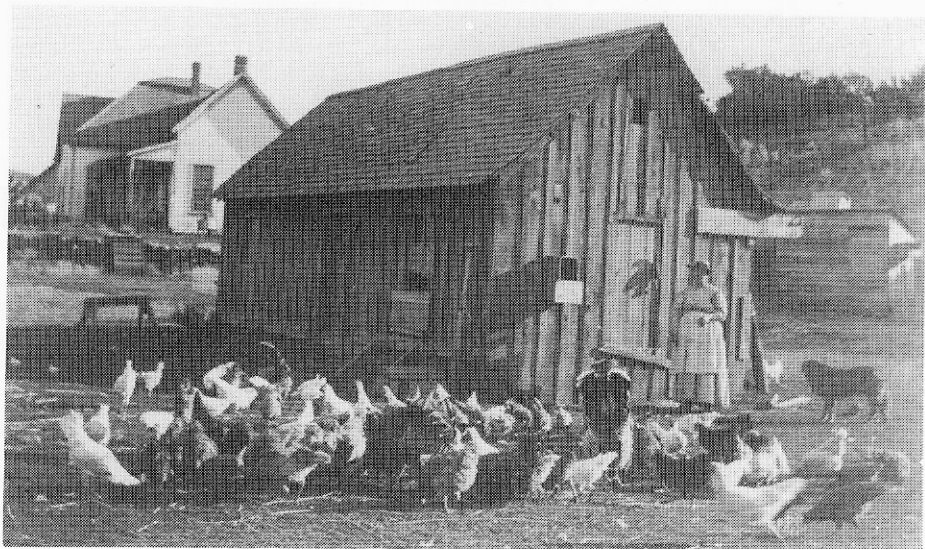
The design of the homestead shack was crude. Usually four long timbers were laid on the ground for the base and then four corner timbers were placed for the upright corners, then the four top timbers were fastened in place using square nails. This frame work was then sheeted with unplanned lumber nailed to it. Each board (they always varied in width) was fastened to the top frame and the base frame, being set upright. The cracks were then battened over with narrower strips of lumber.

Pictures on the following page show the start of a homestead shack with the bed springs and trunks of the family piled to the side. The next picture shows the scrap lumber being cut for fire wood. The third picture shows the finished house with all the improvements: the clothes line, water barrel and fuel box.□





Interior of early homestead cabin. Note gourd dipper, sawhorse table, clothesline closet and kerosene lantern. The lady is Elizabeth Ann Boone shown with two of her grandchildren.



The fate of many an abandoned homestead shack.

—Courtesy of Olive Davis

A Brief Sketch Of The Pioneering Of The Edward A. Stone Family Of Thornton, Whitman County, Washington

By Viola Stone Oakes

On September 8, 1848, Edward Albert Stone was born to the pioneering family of Albert Ward and Alice Stone in Bonaparte, Van Buren County, Iowa. Edward's father was, in 1853, the captain of a caravan of settlers bound for California.

Upon reaching California, the family settled near Marysville. Later they moved to the Alamo and Walnut Creek area where they established a home in a beautiful glen which was later called Stone Valley.

In the meantime, Joshua Minshall and family moved from Thamesville, Ontario, to Pacheco, California. Their daughter, Elizabeth Helen, and the curly, red-haired, young Edward Stone were to meet and marry in Pacheco in 1878.

While the young family lived in Pacheco, a daughter, Alice Pauline, was born on February 6, 1879. She was the first of the large and long-lived family of children.

By December 25, 1880 the family was living near Hubbard, Oregon, where a second daughter, Lucia May, was born. The family found this area on the Pudding River near Salem had many cases of malaria causing many deaths, particularly amongst infants and young children. The Stones decided that a more healthful living place would have to be found.

Edward heard of the great possibilities for homesteaders in Washington Territory. He traveled up the Columbia River by boat, and finally on horseback to eastern Washington. He was equipped with a saddle and planned to buy a pony at Ainsworth. His first destination was to be Sprague, where his cousin, Perry Fisher, had settled and would be able to give him guidance in finding suitable land.

Ainsworth was a busy place, made important by the activities of the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company. Upon his arrival in Ainsworth, Edward found one of the O.R. & N. boats laden with freight was sinking. The company was trying desperately to get men to help salvage the freight. They could enlist none of the laborers who already had all the work they wanted at high wages, so Edward volunteered to help with the salvage work. The railroad representatives were so grateful they offered to pay Edward anything he asked. After three days the railroad officials decided the ship should be abandoned and they allowed her to sink with the remaining cargo. When asked what pay he wanted for his work, Edward requested passage on the O.R. & N. work train which was in operation as far as Cheney. After Edward arrived in Cheney with his saddle he bought a pony and proceeded to ride to the home of his cousin in Sprague.

Perry Fisher knew of a piece of land on Thorn Creek in the Palouse country. It was located near the present sites of Thornton, Rosalia, Sunset, and Pine City. This land had been homesteaded and abandoned. The homesteader had made a dug-out in the side of the hill and had boarded it to make it habitable for the mid-western young woman whom he planned to marry. The lady had heard of the Indian up-risings and decided the West was not for her. Therefore, this excellent piece of land was available. (The three-room dug-out later became a root cellar for the Stone family.)

After inspecting the land, Edward rode to Colfax, the county seat. Upon confirmation of the availability of the land, he filed a claim on it on July 3, 1881. After finishing his business affairs, he stopped to visit other settlers who were gathered on the court house grounds.

While the new-comers were getting acquainted, a young man with a telegram rode into Colfax from Walla Walla with the sad news that President Garfield had been shot the preceding day.

Edward hauled lumber from Idaho, hired and paid a carpenter to build a house and barn, dig a well, and make further preparations for the arrival of the family. He returned to Oregon to get his wife and two small daughters. After a



Mr. and Mrs. Edward R. Stone and eight of their nine children.

—Courtesy of Myrtle Stone

long, tedious covered-wagon trip they arrived safely, only to find the carpenter had left without finishing the work.

On September 3, 1883, Helen Cecilia was born to the homesteaders. Edna Blanche was born October 1, 1885. Her health was frail and death came to her on December 5, 1905.

From time to time Elizabeth Helen's father, Joshua Minshall, came to live with the family. He taught his son-in-law contour plowing and care of sick animals. At times, neighbors asked him to set human bones.

The first educational contact for the older daughters was in the home of Mrs. Bryson. One of these girls said many years later the restroom facilities were of course segregated—when necessary the boys went behind the barn and the little girls went in the barn.

Mrs. Bryson was a very kind woman with a most limited formal education. When the family discovered the children were being taught to pronounce the final "B" in comb and lamb, and other gross errors, the girls were removed from school. Joshua Minshall then took on the responsibility of their education.

Later the West Liberty School was organized between the Stone's homestead and Pine City, and later when the village of Thornton was created, the three oldest daughters continued to ride horseback to the West Liberty School for several years, although Thornton had a crude school house which had slats nailed over the cracks to keep the wind out. After this building was demolished, a typical one-room school building with a bell and steeple was erected and the girls then transferred to this school. They were joined by their sisters Edna and Martha Elizabeth who had been born on October 15, 1888. There was a six-month-term of school.

In 1897, the six oldest daughters, including Ethel Viola who was born September 19, 1890, enrolled in the Oakesdale school. In the spring of 1898 the three oldest girls graduated from the ninth grade which was the highest grade taught in the Oakesdale school at that time. When Ethel Viola entered the Oakesdale school she was placed in the second grade because she did not know how to work short division. She had been taught at home to read fluently.

Three more children, Hazel Evelyn, born January 14, 1893; Albert born November 12, 1895; and Myrtle Minshall, born February 15, 1898, had been too young to attend the Oakesdale school. They were to receive most of their elementary education in Thornton.

By the fall of 1898, Thornton had a two-room school building with two teachers. James Smith was the principal and instructor for grades four through eight and Miss Minnie Harris, later Mrs. Ernest Wagner taught grades one through three. Hazel and Viola were in this room and Martha Elizabeth and Edna were in Mr. Smith's room.

The following year, Mr. James S. Albright and E. S. Oakes, newcomers from Tennessee arrived in Thornton. Mr. Albright was both principal and teacher of grades four through eight and Mr. Oakes had the primary grades. This was the second year of schooling where the year was extended to nine months.

The next school year the young principal, J. S. Albright, recruited drop-outs who were in many cases about school age. He taught them rhetoric, civics, debating, and the usual subjects for the seventh and eighth grades. He taught during the recess periods as well as after school hours. As a consequence, there were rough moments on the playgrounds. The older pupils in the Thornton school helped younger ones with their spelling, arithmetic, and the other subjects so the teacher had time to hear the older pupils recite.

The principals organized basket socials to raise money to purchase story books for the bookshelves. Mr. Albright started our library with such reading as

the Alcott books, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Aesop's Fables, Grimm's and Andersen's Fairy Tales, Pilgrim's Progress, Tom Brown's School Days and many books of poetry. There were also books on good manners, success, health and an immense atlas.

In the fourth grade we memorized such poems as The Heritage, The Day Is Done, Abou Ben Adhem, Paul Revere's Ride, patriotic poems and similar literature. While we could not really understand the depth of what we memorized, we did have a reverence for literature and its oratorical aspects.

In this early period, pupils who wished to continue their education were required to pass the Eighth Grade Examination. After finishing the ninth grade in Oakesdale High School and or the examination, family members were able to continue their education in the preparatory department of Washington Agricultural School of Science now Washington State University.

The older sisters took teachers' examinations and taught rural school to earn money to attend summer school and finally all except the two youngest members of the family received two-year diplomas from Eastern Washington College of Education. Hazel, Albert and Myrtle earned B.A. degrees from Washington State University while four other members received their B.A. degrees from the University of Washington. Four members of the family received M.A. or M.B.A. degrees from the University of Washington. Two members received doctorates from New York University.

Of the nine children of Edward and Elizabeth Helen Stone, seven were still living when this article was written on July 5, 1974. Of course, all are retired, since their ages range from 76 to 95 years.

The family burial plot in the Thornton Cemetery has only four graves: Edna Blanche died December 5, 1905; the mother, Elizabeth Helen died February 24, 1920; the father, Edward Albert died March 1, 1941; and Hazel Evelyn died September 21, 1957. □

Dugout Gives First Shelter to Homesteaders

Nelson Howard came across the Great Plains from Bangor, Maine at the age of nineteen years. His wife, the daughter of the George Clarks, came across the plains with her parents at the age of seven from Virginia. She first came to California and later to Eugene, Oregon where she met Mr. Howard. They were married at Hepner, Oregon, where they resided for a short time. Others of the Clark family who lived in this area were Nellie Clark Huntley, Melissa Clark Newmeyer and Louisa Elizabeth Clark Baker, who were sisters of Mary Howard. Their father and mother later came to the area and settled on what was the James Milne farm, then later moved to a farm below Sunset, near his brother Henry Clark.

From Hepner, the Howards came to St. John in 1873 and about two years later, in 1875, they moved to Thornton. He owned two hundred acres of land about two and one half miles from Thornton across the road from the farm where Hugh McDonald and son now reside. The McDonald farm and the Dale Curtis farm were owned by George Newmeyer and wife at that time. They built a dug-out shelter in the side of the hill to live in until they could obtain lumber and build a proper home. The Newmeyer children were Anna (now living in Portland), Carrie, Frank and Georgina, all deceased. After Mr. Newmeyer died in 1884, his wife sold part of the land to Nelson Howard and he built the house and barn that still stand. He planted an orchard, part of which still remains. In 1879 he obtained eighty acres of land by planting a timber culture. This involved the setting of many trees. There are very few timber cultures left in Whitman county

at this time. Until wire became available, they had to depend on digging ditch fences, which was another long and tedious task.

The Howards arrived just prior to the Indian Wars. Once Mrs. Howard saw wagons going by all day and heard the neighbors were moving to a nearby fort because of an Indian scare. Another time she heard someone coming toward the house, and hid with her nine-month-old baby under the bed. But it turned out to be her husband returning. The men in the neighborhood held a meeting and asked for a volunteer to go for the soldiers. Mr. Howard offered to go and received three hundred dollars for making the trip. One morning, as they started out on their long ride for the day, they found the Indians had been camped very close to them the night before.

Mr. Howard was concerned about the scarcity of schools and the lack of facilities for his growing daughters. He was one of the men responsible for the building of one of the early schoolhouses of the area. Rough lumber was used to build a school on land, given by Mrs. Newmeyer, across from the present Curtis house. It was not formally named, but the neighbors all called it the Howard School, as Mr. Howard was one of the directors. This building was later used for a tool shed, when a new and much better school was built in 1892 on



MR. AND MRS. NELSON HOWARD

not formally named, but the neighbors called it the Howard School, as Mr. Howard was one of the directors. This building was later used for a tool shed, when a new and much better school was built in 1892 on land at the corner. It was called the Howard School, too, as Mr. Howard gave the land and promoted the construction. The first teachers boarded at the Howards, since this was the closest farm. Much of the teaching equipment, such as books, charts, maps and slates, were selected by Mr. Howard.

Before churches were established in the area, the schoolhouses were also used for religious meetings, funerals and voting. Sunday school conventions were held in the Howard grove several years. Each group would furnish a program with a basket dinner at noon.

The Howard children were Octavia Howard McEwen (deceased), Ella Howard McCarthy living in Chicago, Zetta, who married Dr. E. J. Widby, a young doctor, who later studied in Vienna and became an eye specialist in Wenatchee (both deceased), and Zena, who resides in Lake Oswego, Oregon.

Mr. Howard sold his two hundred and forty acre farm to Secrest for \$14,000. He thought it contained too much waste land in the wet flats and groves. He bought the Gallagher place, three miles further west, where they lived a year, then he bought a home for the family in Sunset, where they lived for eight or ten years. Later they lived in Steptoe, where he died following surgery in 1914. Mrs. Howard died in 1928. □ **FOOTNOTE:** This article and the following one were written by Neita Curtis. Mattias Swegle was the great great grandfather of Dale Curtis.

Matthias Swegle

Matthias Swegle was born in 1826 in Trenton, New Jersey. When he was ten years old he moved with his parents to Canton, Illinois. His father was anxious that his family be educated, so he built a log cabin schoolhouse with a fireplace, the first school in Canton. He hired a teacher and wrote a book of arithmetic in long hand, to be used for a text. The book is still preserved. When Matthias was fifteen years old, he and his older brother, Charley, hauled grain to Chicago by ox-team. Chicago was then only a small village. The trip was not easy as the roads were bad, and careful driving was necessary to keep from miring down.

In 1847 the family decided to move again, this time to the Oregon Territory. Matthias' father was a blacksmith as well as a farmer. He built prairie schooner wagons and a spring wagon for the trip. The wife and daughters were to ride in the spring wagon, pulled with horses. The other wagons were drawn by oxen. It took them nearly a year to get ready. Others joined until there were sixty wagons in the train that left Columbia county, Missouri in April of 1848. They were on the trail for six months, a long, hard trip.

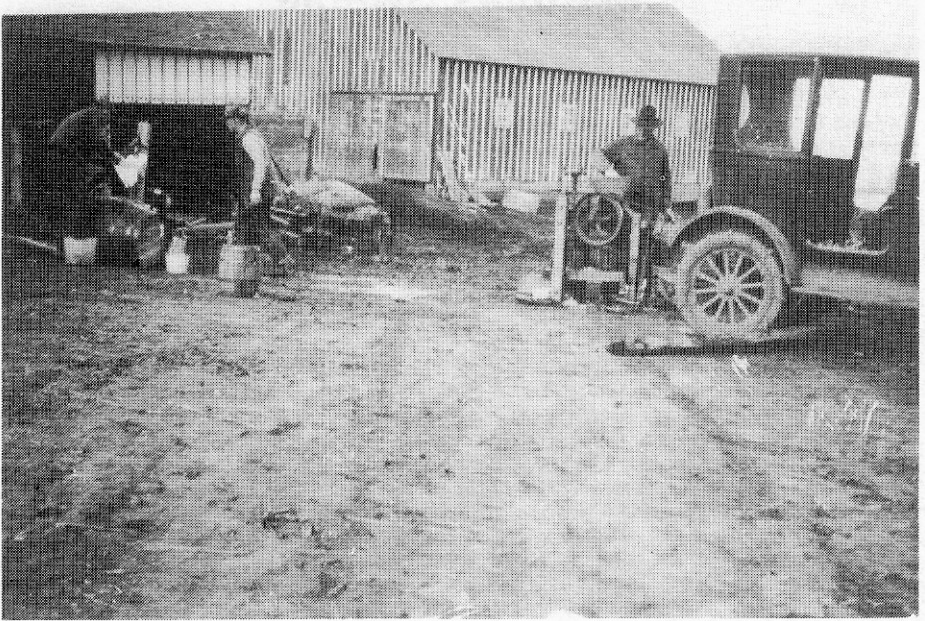
It was October when they reached Oregon, so they spent their first winter at Oregon City, then moved to a farm near Salem. Matthias married Margaret Grier in 1853 and seven children were born to this union. After the death of his first wife, he married Belle Moore and three more children were born.

In 1878 he made a trip alone to Cashup, near Thornton and purchased one hundred and sixty acres of land from the railroad for two dollars and fifty cents an acre. While living alone, he learned that the Indians were on the war-path, so he slept with his gun and axe by his side. The next year his son, Prince, came to live with him. His wife and younger children joined him shortly thereafter. Prince had ridden his pony by the wagon of friends to Dayton, then rode the rest of the distance alone. He was fourteen years old at the time. He later bought land joining his father's. He remembers when they made their own skis to use on the side of Steptoe Butte. His sister, Gretta, and brother, Ed, went to school at Cashup in 1884 when D. F. Ravens taught the school. Gretta wrote of times when they went to the dances at the hotel on top of the Butte.

They first had to haul their grain to Sprague because the railroad had not yet been built. Prince remembers seeing the stage from Walla Walla to Spokane stop at the James Milne stage stop to change horses. In 1879, when Prince first came, he had hired out to dig ditch fences for two dollars a day. He married and his two children were born at the farm. They rode horseback to school until the horse died and then they had to walk. Later they were happy to drive a single seated buggy with a leaky top.

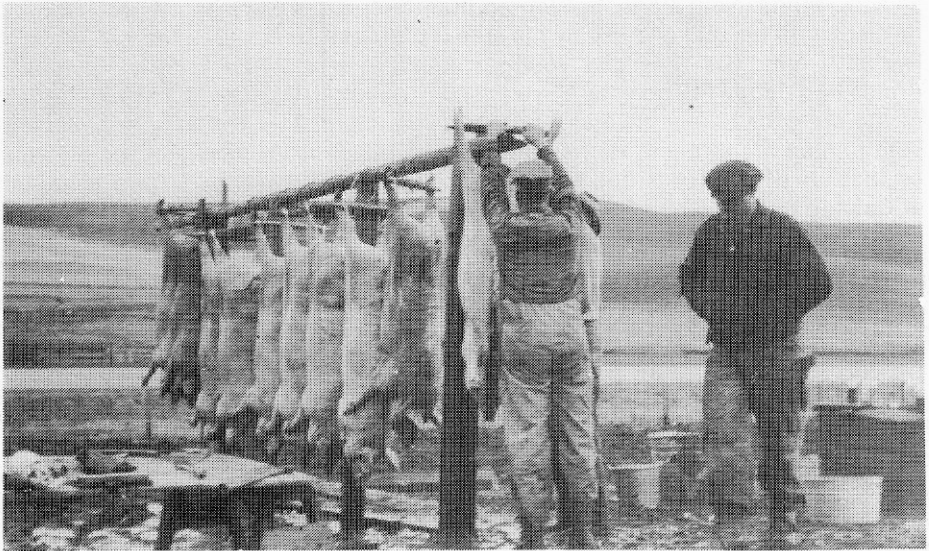
Matthias Swegle died in 1891 at his farm home. Of his family, two children died young, and one daughter remained in Oregon. Prince later moved to Seattle as did his sister, Ida, who married George Moyer. Gretta married Tom Matlock, and Ed never married, but moved to California. The rest of the family settled here in the Thornton area, including his son, John, who had eight children. A daughter, Mary Swegle Dickinson, who had eight children and a daughter, Martha Swegle Curtis, who also had eight children. Many of their descendants still reside in this vicinity.

Neighbors around 1880 were: Weitmans, T. Y. Williams, James (Cashup) Davis, James Milne Sr., Bill Hughs, George Comegys, C. H. Colwell, Polk Crawford, Armstongs, Sains and Carmodys. (Carmodys built a sod house to live in until they could get the material for a log cabin).□



—Courtesy of Roy H. Davis

Making cider with the old flivver furnishing the power.



—Roy Davis Photo

Butchering at Harry Sodorff's place.

Merry Christmas

Remember that special friend or relative with a gift subscription to the Bunchgrass Historian or a gift membership in the Whitman County Historical Society.