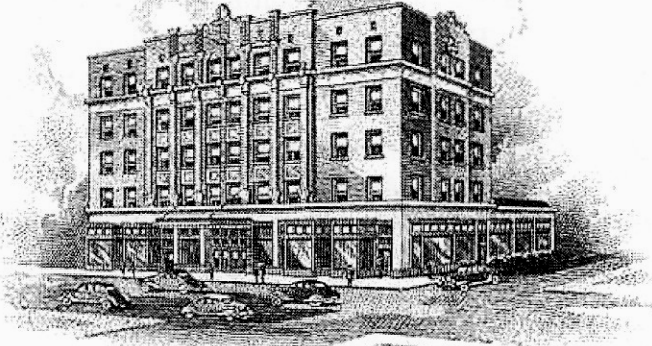


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Colfax, Washington**

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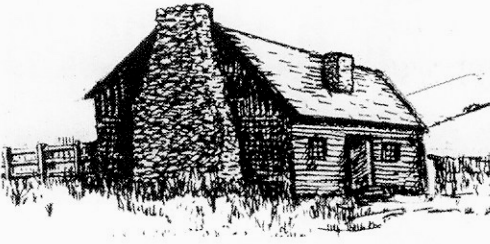
\$175,000 COMMUNITY HOTEL

WASHINGTON HOTEL

COFFEE SHOP AND DINING ROOM

PULLMAN, WASHINGTON

- **Pullman's Washington Hotel: A Community Effort**
 - **When Fences Criss-Crossed the Palouse**
-



Whitman County Historical Society Colfax, Washington

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COVER

The Washington Hotel stationery is shown on the covers. On the front cover is the image from envelopes and on the back cover is that from the stationery - a sheet that was used on December 13, 1940.

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Robert King lives and works in Anchorage, Alaska, but he retains his interest in the history of Pullman where he was raised. Bob collects Pullman memorabilia, and this article on the Hotel grew from his research about some of the objects he has acquired and which illustrate this article.

A retired farmer, **Glenn Leitz** still lives near Waverly on the farm where he grew up. He has developed a keen interest and expertise in the area's history. Glenn has published numerous books and articles on local history. He actively volunteers in the local historical societies of our Palouse region.



*Detail of a plate from the
Washington Hotel china service*

Blank stock certificate for the "Pullman Community Hotel Corporation"



Pullman's Washington Hotel: A Community Effort

by Robert E. King

In 1928, a new five-story hotel opened in Pullman, Washington, that served the community over the next four decades. Its origin was unusual, being built as the result of a widespread concerted community effort to raise money for its construction. This article traces The hotel's origin, use, and demise.

The Washington Hotel, constructed in 1927 on the southeast corner of Pine and Main streets in downtown Pullman, was the last in a series of hotels that had been built during the early days of the town. In 1883, less than two years after Pullman's establishment, Pullman pioneer Mark True opened the community's first hotel. It was called "The Palace" and was last located on southwest corner of Pine and Main streets.¹ It was subsequently joined by several others, including the Artesian Hotel, built in 1892 on the southwest corner of Main Street and Grand Avenue; the smaller Eagle Hotel, built nearby on West Main also in 1892; and Hotel Pullman (later called the Alton Hotel), built in 1893 near today's Neill Public Library.

Yet age and especially fires took their toll. The Eagle and Palace hotels burned in 1903 and 1909 respectively, the Artesian also went up in flames in 1922, and the Alton was condemned in 1918. By 1923, only two hotels remained. One was the "New" Palace Hotel, later called the Pullman Hotel, built in 1908-09 on the southeast corner of Grand and Olsen; it burned in 1992 and is currently the site of the Cougar Plaza. The other was the two-story brick building on the northeast corner of Paradise and Alder (later called Kamiaken), built in 1915 and known as the Russell House in 1919 and by 1930 as the Russell Hotel. It closed in 1954 and became the Moose Lodge. There were also a few smaller hotel-boarding houses. Together, these were all that Pullman had to offer visitors at a time when the State College of Washington (now WSU) was steadily growing along with the town. Increasingly, the consensus of town residents was that a new hotel was needed. But how to get one?

After much discussion by town and college leaders, the Chamber of Commerce appointed a hotel committee in April of 1925. Within months, a well-designed plan was crafted to solicit pledges of money from town and area residents during 1926-1927, entitling backers to receive stock in the new venture. Further, the "Pullman Community Hotel Corporation" was organized, with George H. Watt (of Watt's Pharmacy) elected President. Also serving as officers were A. Eugene Kelly as Vice-President, W. C. Kruegel as Secretary-Treasurer, George H. Gannon (of the State College) as Chairman, and R. L. Jenner as General Sales Manager. Completing the group were 29 other prominent Pullman businessmen and college leaders.²



*Hotel match book cover,
late 1920s*

On April 1, 1927, the *Pullman Herald* proudly proclaimed that the campaign had closed “with \$130,800 of stock subscriptions and more coming.” A list of the new stockholders included names of 339 people representing virtually all of the town’s leading citizens and businesses.³ In addition, the Business and Professional Women’s Club, the Goodfellowship Club, the Evening Star Lodge of the Knights No. 26 of the Knights of Pythias, and several other local organizations also pledged money. Further, many college leaders, including President Ernest O. Holland, bought stock, and sixteen fraternities and sororities did the same. In all, it was a grand showing of local spirit and determination for a new facility that would benefit both the town and college.

With about \$156,000 in hand by May 1927, a call for proposals to construct the facility went out with a bid deadline of late May. A total of 39 bids came in from all over the Pacific Northwest. These included 10 for general construction, 9 for plumbing, 9 for heating, 8 for wiring, and 3 for elevator installation. Unfortunately, the lowest bids added up to a total construction cost (not even including the furnishings budget) that was more than the amount of money available. Consequently, all bids were initially rejected, but the bidders were also notified that soon they would receive altered

plans and specifications. The idea was to make just enough changes to reduce construction costs by 15%, but “without reducing the number of rooms or the floor space for lobby or other rooms.”⁴ Accordingly, changed plans were quickly developed, a second round of bids hurriedly solicited, and the result was the receipt of lower bids that fit within the available funding. Jubilant, in early June, the trustees of the Pullman Community Hotel Corporation authorized corporation officers to execute contracts for the work. And on June 13, 1927, construction work began on the new 60-room hotel. The main contractor was the Portland firm of Hedge & Huls, with two other Portland firms doing the wiring and elevator installation.⁵ Local Pullman businessman J. E. Hammond received the plumbing and heating contracts.

For the hotel’s location, the hotel corporation had secured a prominent spot on the south side of Main Street, the site of the former Herald Building, which had burned in 1919. Originally, the site had been part of the Dan McKenzie homestead, and according to an early Pullman area resident, Miss Bloom Taylor, a furniture store operated by McKenzie and a Mr. Phillips stood in 1887 at about the location

of the Washington Hotel.⁶ The new hotel was directly east across Pine Street from where Pullman's first hotel, the Palace, had burned 10 years earlier.

Still to be decided, however, was the name for the new structure. For that task, a committee was formed, including Pullman Mayor E. E. Wegner, WSC President Ernest O. Holland, local businessman Thomas C. Martin, prominent bank President Fred C. Forrest, and WSC Professor George H. Gannon. However, the debate over names became so heated that the decision was thrown back to the board of directors of the hotel corporation. The conclusion to call it "The Washington Hotel" was subsequently announced in the *Pullman Herald* July 22 with an explanation that the name proposed was considered the best of a group of three finalists. The others had been "The Thatuna Hotel," for the Thatuna Mountains east of neighboring Moscow, Idaho, and "The Inland Empire Hotel." Ultimately, the Thatuna name was considered less appropriate due to its Idaho association, while "Inland Empire" was also deemed less appropriate than "Washington," which had the benefit of being part of the college's name. So "The Washington Hotel" it was!

As to furnishing the new facility, another committee was formed in June 1927 to work with the Multnomah Hotels Company, the contracted operator of the new hotel. This time, local businessmen were selected, including some with backgrounds in the furniture business. The committee included W. C. Kruegel, Jay Noble Emerson, Robert Neill, Lee Allen, and Frank T. Barnard.

When construction started in mid-June of 1927, minor problems arose. Among those was the encroachment of a wall of the Pullman Garage, the adjacent business.



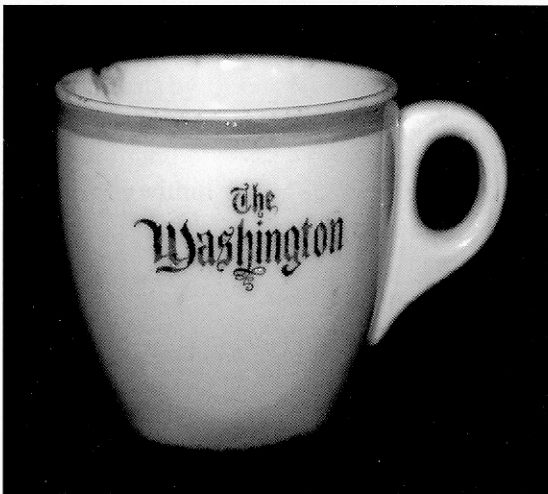
*Washington Hotel, 1930s
The house to the right of the hotel still stands on Paradise Street.*

It extended several inches onto the hotel lot. Another problem was water encountered four feet below surface; this ultimately required use of an electric pump during construction of the foundation work.⁷ Yet, these problems and others were solved, and Pullmanites watched the hotel rapidly rise during the remainder of 1927 in time for its grand opening celebration on New Year's Eve.

So what resulted? The five-story brick hotel, with certain Art Deco design elements, included a lobby, lounge, dining rooms, and modern kitchen, plus a large ballroom for community gatherings. The 60 guest rooms all had individual lavatories (a first for any Pullman hotel), with 24 also having tub baths and another 20 having shower baths. Occupants of the remaining 16 rooms apparently shared common bath facilities entered from the hallways. An interesting feature added in the lobby was a tablet listing the town's citizens who were instrumental in bringing the college to Pullman in 1890.⁸

Along the exterior, four shops with street entries were built on Pine and Main streets. Even before construction began, the Western Union Telegraph Company signed a 10-year contract for \$900 per year for the corner location. The "Stage Depot," otherwise known as the bus depot, was adjacent to it. In later years, the hotel would remodel and occupy some of the area originally designed for businesses.

The New Year's Eve 1927 official opening of the hotel was a gala affair. To organize it, another 5-person committee had been appointed, including Mrs. Serena Mathews, a long-time Pullman resident.⁹ The joyful event stretched over five hours and included a banquet, program, dancing, and other entertainment. The cost was a relatively modest \$2.50 per plate, with reservations open to the public. In use during the opening was the hotel's special chinaware, each piece handsomely marked with the words "The Washington."



Piece of Washington Hotel chinaware

As for attendance, 275 people were seated at the inaugural banquet, while an estimated 1,000 more came to view the new facility.¹⁰ To help, the Girl Scouts were enlisted to conduct tours. Appropriately, one of the honored guests at the banquet was none other than 80-year-old Mark True, Pullman's first hotel operator. During the event, WSC Professor and Hotel Corporation Chairman George Gannon proudly reflected on the history of efforts to secure the hotel. Also, WSC President Holland spoke on its benefit for

the college as a needed place for visitors. He noted the value of operating the new community facility “in an orderly and law-abiding way.”

Erich V. Hauser, Jr., President of the Multnomah Hotel chain that was operating the new facility, was additionally featured as a speaker for the hotel’s opening. He thanked the assembled crowd for the “confidence and trust” given to his firm in being allowed to operate the hotel. He also congratulated the townspeople for becoming so “financially and morally interested in a single project” – the key to its success. Other invited guests included Mr. and Mrs. Harry Driscoll, who operated the aging rival Pullman Hotel on Grand Avenue, plus other hotel managers from Moscow, Lewiston, and elsewhere. For them, the new 60-room hotel must have left them with somewhat mixed emotions as it would inevitably draw some of their clientele.

In reporting the December 31, 1927, event that spilled over into New Year’s Day 1928, the *Herald* on page 1 of the January 6 edition proclaimed that “jollification and happiness knew no bounds” as proud citizens of Pullman and the region celebrated “Pullman’s magnificent new five-story hotel.” The paper trumpeted: “It was an event which marked an outstanding epoch in Pullman’s history; the dedication to public use of a hotel which brings great credit to the city and stands as a fitting monument to community spirit and the faith of the people in the future of the town and the college.” And so it was open!

Yet within three weeks, the hotel faced an unexpected threat: water damage. On February 20, 1928, a rapid melting of snow caused flooding along Main Street that was the worst since the disastrous 1910 flood. Sand bagging on three sides of the hotel prevented water from flowing into the lobby and dining area, but there was still damage to the basement heating plant. The Pullman paper described the situation as follows:

The furnace room of The Washington became inundated Friday morning [January 20th] and the city fire truck was used to pump the water from the basement, but for several hours the hotel was without heat. The barricade of sand bags on the outside of the doors worked effectively in keeping the water out of the lobby and dining rooms, however, and business went on as usual, despite the fact that the hotel was surrounded with water on three sides. The hotel was filled to capacity, every room being rented, but none of the roomers became panicky and many watched the battle against the flood waters from the vantage point of their windows.¹¹

Despite such occasional problems, over the course of the next four decades the Washington Hotel was the site of numerous private, city, high school, and college events. By the fall of 1928, the Washington Water Power Company had already established the tradition of hosting special free cooking schools for the community, with one held October 4-6, 1928, in the new hotel. The Washington Hotel’s dining



The First National Bank of Pullman's 50th Anniversary program held in the Washington Hotel on Thursday, June 10, 1937

room and coffee shop quickly became community favorites, with fountain service offered. By mid-1929, just before the Depression struck, the hotel was advertising its daily "Merchants' Lunch" from 11:30 am to 2:00 pm for 50 cents, its "Table de Hote" dinner from 5:30 pm to 8:00 pm for one dollar, as well as its all-day Sunday meal for one dollar. Later, in 1932 during the Depression, food prices were reduced 25 percent.¹²

For all the time that the Washington Hotel was in business, the local Pullman newspaper carried numerous reports of events showing the facility as one of the social hubs of the town. In mid-April 1930, the *Pullman Herald* even reported that cigars were passed out at the hotel to celebrate the births of children of three of the employees, including a child born to Mrs. Fred Rohwer, wife of the hotel manager.¹³

By the 1930s, many college social events were also being held in the popular Washington Hotel, including the annual military ball. Many of the visiting guests for the college stayed in the new hotel, though special dignitaries, such as governors, more likely stayed in the home of the college president. Interestingly, in January of 1937, Chester Dissmore, noted Pullman businessman for many decades, spent his first night in town staying in the Washington Hotel. This was the day of his arrival before starting his successful grocery business, known to Pullman residents to this day.¹⁴



The Hotel in the 1940s

While the hotel welcomed many other Pullman-bound travelers of this time, in 1940, one of the most famous people in the United States was unable to stay in the Washington Hotel. She was world-acclaimed African-American singer Marian Anderson, who had been brought to the college to appear in a Community Concert Association program in the WSC gymnasium on March 5, 1940. While the local paper before her arrival told of the already legendary racial incident when Anderson was barred from singing in Constitution Hall in Washington, DC, by request of the Daughters of the American Revolution, it failed to later report what happened in Pullman. The much-honored singer was discretely directed to stay in the older Pullman Hotel rather than the more elegant Washington Hotel. It was an event still remembered by some Pullmanites today who shake their heads at what appears to have been the town's own version of racial

discrimination against the famous singer.¹⁵

Around the same time, in early March 1940, the hotel was the site of the annual Sportsmen's Banquet "that filled the Washington Hotel dining room to capacity." Similarly, Spengler's Bakery staged a banquet in the hotel for about 60 Pullman grocery men and their wives on March 27, 1940. Later, on April 25, 1940, the Washington Hotel was the site of a college-sponsored "Social Skills – Etiquette Dinner Party," organized for Home Economics majors. Students learned proper behavior related to dining while eating a multi-course dinner composed of fruit cocktail and wafer, molded salad, roast pork and dressing, potatoes and gravy, green beans, ice cream and cake, and coffee or milk.¹⁶

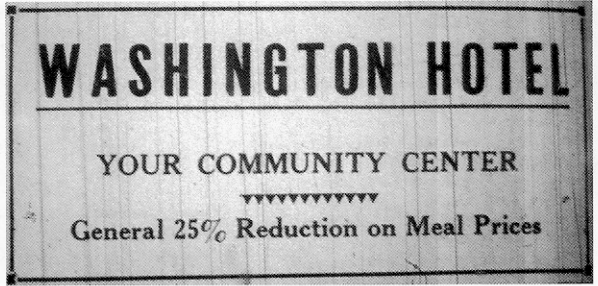
Many Pullmanites found employment at the Washington Hotel over the years. For instance, Gladys (Lawrence) Semingson Congdon (1912-2008), who moved to Pullman in the early 1940s, worked there as a waitress. This was before her marriage to Trent Congdon in 1947, after which they operated Trent's Grocery on Grand Avenue for many years.¹⁷ JoAnn (Clarke) Brown, sister of the late Pullman historian Don Clarke (1930-2009), also worked as a waitress in the Washington Hotel for some time after graduation from high school. Another Pullman resident, Mrs. Ray Pelton, who operated "Pelton's Grill" (now the site of "My Office Tavern" on Grand Avenue), later came to manage the Washington Hotel restaurant and for a time was also a cook there.¹⁸

Another Washington Hotel waitress of this time, Edna Kampfer, was featured in an August 28, 1942, human-interest story printed in the Pullman paper. By that time, she had worked as a waitress there for 12 years but was leaving to become manager of the Cougar Cottage on the WSC campus. A front-page story showed her serving at a luncheon for the local Kiwanis Club, wearing her typical waitress uniform and carrying a large tray of food to a group of diners composed of local businessmen. She was honored at the gathering (though still had to serve!) and was given a going-away gift of a ring by the group. She reported that her job at the hotel "meant going to work early in the morning and not getting home until late at night sometimes." She also added the bittersweet comment that she "never had a chance to feed my daughter when she was little ... and she was usually asleep when I came home from work at night." The article then quoted the longtime waitress in recalling the favorite foods of her regular customers. For James T. Roberts, owner of the Milk House dairy, and later the town's postmaster, she reported that he "mostly lives on desserts—he especially likes huckleberry cobbler."¹⁹

A more sobering report involving use of the Washington Hotel appeared the next month in the local paper, at a time when the nation was involved in the Second World War. From the start, the hotel had been designed to furnish not only comfortable lodging for overnight visitors, but also housing for people needing longer-term accommodations. This sometimes included college professors and other townspeople needing temporary quarters. Along this line, in September of 1942, the Washington Hotel became the residence for Mrs. P. B. Halvorson and her two daughters, refugees from war-threatened Alaska, as they looked



for a suitable apartment. They reportedly had left Mr. Halvorson, the Chief Engineer at the Power Plant at Haines, Alaska, due to the uncertainties of the ongoing Japanese attacks on the far northern territory, plus the “serious problem” of possible food shortages that were occurring there. According to Mrs. Halvorson, “It is difficult to ship enough for both the army and the civilian population.”²⁰ Instead, Mrs. Halvorson and her daughters were able to dine in comfort in the Washington Hotel as they settled into Pullman for the war’s duration.



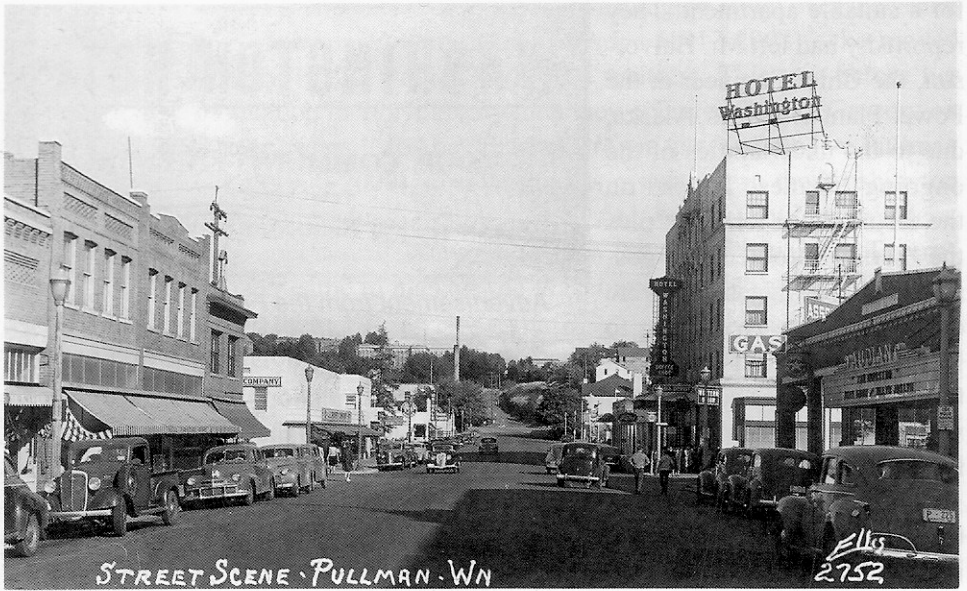
*Advertisement from the February 26, 1932,
Pullman Herald*

Before, during, and after World War II, the Washington Hotel continued to be the center of much of the town’s club activities. In the fall of 1942, a special ‘Washington Hotel Club Calendar’ was being printed in the *Pullman Herald*, showing the times and topics of the weekly meetings of Lion’s Club, Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau, and Kiwanis. These and other groups would regularly meet in the hotel for many years to follow, having special rooms for their events.

Over its life, the Washington Hotel saw a string of managers, with some staying only a short time. By 1940, Ward J. Walmer was manager but was gone only a year or two later.²¹ On January 1, 1943, manager Dwight Higgins resigned, to be succeeded by M. B. “Slim” Burtness, former manager of the Desert Hotel Oasis in Spokane. By mid-June 1943, J. H. “Jack” Sorensen, a hotel operator from Logan, Utah, was the Washington Hotel’s manager.²² Some of this may have been related to the difficulties of operating a hotel during wartime and coping with rationing of both food and fuel.

Perhaps connected to this, in October 1944, local businessmen John Gannon and Mel Hinman offered to buy the hotel for about \$110,000. The local paper explained that the original stock in the hotel was valued at \$100 per share but had fluctuated in value to as low as \$30 per share, with the current value “in the neighborhood of \$50 to \$55.”²³ The prospective buyers would be paying about \$90 per share to the approximate 250 stockholders at that time. The sale was finalized, and for the first time in its history the community hotel became privately owned. At this time, Fred C. Forest, president of a local Pullman bank, was president of the Hotel Corporation—indeed, he was the last one.

Following their purchase, the new owners had great hopes for the hotel.²⁴ But by late 1947, they were having financial difficulties, especially with the dining services. To obtain possible help, in November 1947, as reported in the *Pullman Herald*, November 14, 1947, Hinman, the manager of the Washington Hotel, met



The Hotel in the 1930s

with Maynard Hix, President of the Board of Trustees for the local Kiwanian Club. The problem, Hinman explained, was that “the hotel is obliged to carry a large staff to meet its peak loads [for serving food] and that volume is not large enough at other times to justify the expense.” Hix suggested that it might be possible to do some rescheduling of the various clubs. However, the newspaper also reported that Hix “asked Hinman if he thought a return to community operation would be desirable.” Hinman replied, “That may be the answer” and added that he and his partner John Gannon “would be open to an offer along this line.”

A week later, November 21, 1947, the *Pullman Herald* reported that Hinman and Gannon had “given an option for the sale of the hotel to an unnamed individual.” On December 19, 1947, the *Herald* revealed the “unnamed individual” to be “a group of four theatre men from Spokane and the Coast”: “W. K. Beckwith, of North Bend, operator of theatres in North Bend and Issaquah; Glenn Haviland, of Seattle, who will manage the hotel; W. R. Seale...who is with Columbia Pictures in Spokane and is former manager of Fox West Coast theatres there; [and] W. L. Seale, who owns and operates the Ritz and Rialto Theatres in Spokane and is a partner with Mr. Beckwith in the Moses Lake theatres.”

The article also noted that “Mr. Haviland, the new manager, will work with Mr. Hinman in the hotel until the first of the year when he takes over.” A few days later, a special Christmas farewell party for Hinman and Gannon was staged at the hotel, with each receiving “gold, initialed cigarette cases” from the hotel employees “as a token of their appreciation for the past pleasant associations.”²⁵



The Hotel in the 1950s

According to the January 9, 1948, *Pullman Herald*, one of the first changes brought by the new “theatre men” owners was hiring Edna Whalen as the dining room hostess and Lewis Melchior as the new chef. The paper further noted that Melchior was formerly of the Lewis and Clark Hotel in Lewiston, Idaho, and was a cousin of the then-famous opera star Lauritz Melchior. The outgoing Washington Hotel chef, “Slim” Skeggs, was further reported to have left town already.

To help entice more customers to eat at the hotel, by late 1948 the local paper regularly carried advertisements of the hotel’s fifty cent “Specials” of the day for each day of the week except Sunday. On Friday, for example, the “Special” was creamed tuna on toast, potatoes, drink, and pudding for dessert. While the relatively low pricing of the daily specials may have added some new hotel customers, what happened in 1949 appears to have enticed many more. For the first time, the hotel obtained a liquor license and was allowed to sell beer, wine, and liquor by the glass. The *Pullman Herald* reported on page one of its February 4, 1949, edition that the Washington Hotel had applied for a Class H liquor license. With its eventual approval some time later, the hotel soon found that alcohol sales added appreciably to its revenues.

Perhaps related to the hotel’s need to make more space for its growing number of new customers, a small gift bar in the hotel operated by Mrs. Elizabeth Matson closed.²⁶ But what also happened in early 1949, while the grant of the liquor license was still pending, was an even bigger surprise to most Pullmanites. Former owner John Gannon was reported by the local paper in page one headlines as repurchasing

the hotel that he and Hinman had sold just over a year earlier.²⁷ The reason? The *Herald*, March 25, 1949, said that Gannon had plans to expand the hotel, including building more rooms, plus he had a sentimental connection to the hotel, having “lived in a house on the hotel site many years ago.” The paper also reported that Gannon would retain George Forbes as hotel manager.

Despite his plans, Gannon’s second period of ownership of the hotel did not last long. While it is unclear when he resold it, by at least 1953 the hotel was in the hands of Art Crossler and John E. Thomas. In September of 1953, they sold it for over \$150,000 to drive-in movie theater businessman, Edward H. Metzgar of Moscow, Idaho, and his partner E. H. Kaser, a retired dentist from Juneau, Alaska.²⁸ Kaser subsequently moved to Pullman to help operate it. Under their ownership, major remodeling of the dining facilities took place. The restaurant and coffee shop were updated and enlarged, with the restaurant dubbed the “Palouse Room,” and a new lounge was called the “Flamingo Room.” Changes were made to the exterior of the building along the ground floor. “An elaborate neon design extending across the front and one side” was added along with new planters and a redesigned street entrance.²⁹ Also, the check-in desk was moved and the kitchen was remodeled, with a new charcoal broiler and a soft ice cream machine.

Ironically, within months the newly remodeled kitchen nearly caused the destruction of the hotel. On January 12, 1954, a deep-fat fryer caught fire in the kitchen at 4:30 am and “guests of the hotel were roused from sleep and evacuated from the building during the height of excitement” amidst smoke. The local paper carried the story under headlines: “Blaze Perils Hotel – Guests Flee Rooms in Heavy Smoke.” Fortunately, the actual danger was less. The “flames were partly dissipated through a ventilating shaft so that the building itself was not damaged, except by smoke, before the fire was put out.”³⁰ Ed Metzgar, by then the sole owner of the hotel, was relieved that the damage wasn’t worse.

At that time, Wilber “Doc” Bohm and Buck Bailey, noted WSC coaches, were two of the longer term residents of the hotel. As bachelors they roomed together in the Washington Hotel for several years, with an amusing incident recalled by another noted WSC sports figure, Weldon B. “Hoot” Gibson. On at least one occasion he shared the same room as Bohm and Bailey so as to be on time to leave with Bailey at 3:00 am to drive to a sports event. Gibson, who slept on the floor, recalled that “sleeping in that hotel room with Buck and Doc was like attending a concert. Both snored loudly and they tended to snore in unison. As you’d lie there, you got no sleep. You had to wait until you got in that rumble seat on the way to Walla Walla and beyond.”³¹ Reportedly, another long-time WSC occupant of the hotel was English professor Paul Kies, one of the original stockholders. He was living there at the time of his death in 1971.³²

And so it went. The Washington Hotel continued to serve the Pullman community after the war and into the 1950s and 1960s. One temporary setback, however,

occurred in 1948. That February, the Washington Hotel suffered extensive damage in one of Pullman's periodic floods. Yet, within a short time, all was repaired and the hotel was again fully operational and serving the community.

By early 1958, the hotel featured a popular Friday evening smorgasbord from 5:30 to 9:00 pm, for \$1.50 for adults and 75 cents for children. Also, various parties including high school proms and assorted private events continued to be held there. An example is a "Back to School" dance and buffet held January 3, 1959, by Buddy Dumas for more than 50 high school seniors and their dates.³³ By this time the Pullman Chamber of Commerce was occupying the corner ground floor business location used for many years by the first tenant, the Western Union Telegraph office. The Chamber's meetings, like many others in the town, were always held in the Washington Hotel.

In the fall of 1959, the hotel once again changed hands. Ed Metzgar, by then owner of the Washington Hotel for over six years, sold out to Charlie Blank, described in the October 8, 1959, *Pullman Herald* as a "Spokane motel operator." The transaction involved Blank "trading in his [Spokane] motel and 320 acres of farm land plus some cash for the Metzgars' stock in the Washington Community Hotel Corporation." The paper added: "In addition, Mr. Blank assumes substantial obligations to a Moscow contractor, who financed part of the previous sale." Subsequently, Blank's son, Garry Blank, joined his father in operating the hotel.



Pullman Main Street in the 1960s

In the 1950s and 1960s there were a variety of businesses using portions of the Washington Hotel. This included a barbershop operated by Ralph Haven, who later moved across Main Street to a shop near Penney's. Dr. James Duffy and Dr. Larry Pogue, Pullman physicians of this period, had medical offices on the second floor of the hotel for a time. Similarly, Dr. H. R. Mooney, a local dentist, practiced there for some years. And for a time, Keith Lincoln ran the "Goal Post" lounge in the Washington Hotel, which had previously operated under other names.³⁴

Yet, in the later 1950s and 1960s, changes were starting to happen to Pullman that would lead to the demise of the Washington Hotel. At that time, an increasing number of modern motels and new restaurants began appearing in Pullman, and gradually the aging Washington Hotel's clientele declined. As an example of the process, the Pullman Chamber of Commerce announced at its Tuesday, December 14, 1965, weekly noon meeting in the Washington Hotel that the following week's meeting on December 21, and thereafter, would be held in the "newly remodeled upstairs banquet room of the Royal Restaurant."³⁵

Similarly, by early 1967 the Rotary Club, which had regularly held meetings in the Washington Hotel, also moved to the newer Royal Restaurant. Starting about 1964, the hotel had been dubbed the "Civic Center," with new signs placed on the building that later was rather curiously painted pink. It was with this distinction that the hotel declined further, with the dining facilities shutting down along with



On the far left is the Washington Hotel building after it had been named the "Civic Center Building." It appears pink in color photographs of the time.

the hotel by the later 1960s or early 1970s. Local Pullman radio station KOFE, a 1960s occupant of the hotel, also left before that decade ended.³⁶ Reportedly, in the later years of the hotel's operation, its sewer system backed up periodically, causing bad odors that frustrated its tenants.³⁷

By that time, the number of established businesses occupying the street level of the hotel had declined, and more transitory firms rented their once prime spaces. One was the "Psych Shop" which sold psychedelic paraphernalia of the "Hippie Period," such as black-light posters. Even those businesses moved out, and by 1972 only the Pullman Recycling Center used any part of the Washington Hotel - and that by permission of the Seattle First National Bank. The bank bought the closed structure in order to demolish it and replace the once heralded five-story hotel with a two-story bank building. And so it happened.³⁸ On June 27, 1972, a 3,000-pound wrecking ball began a four-day siege pounding down the concrete and steel walls of the hotel along with the adjacent sales and service office of Walt Housley Ford (the latter space became the bank's parking lot).³⁹

Soon thereafter, piles of combustible rubble were trucked to a gravel pit between Pullman and Moscow to burn. Yet, perhaps in "final revenge" for its inglorious fate, smoke from the burn pile reportedly drifted back over Pullman to foul local air. Thus ended the Washington Hotel, with only pictures and fading memories to remind the citizens of Pullman of what was once the pride of the city and a grand example of community cooperation.

1 See: "Mark True's Palace Hotel," by Robert E. King, *Bunchgrass Historian*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1996, pp. 4-10.

2 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Jan. 6, 1928, p. 5 and Fri. April 1, 1927, p. 5.

3 When the fundraising campaign was finally over, nearly 400 people had become subscribers. The author's grandfather, Ervin E. King (1894-1941), was among them.

4 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., June 3, 1927, pp. 1, 7.

5 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., June 10, 1927, p. 1 and Fri., June 17, 1927, p. 1.

6 From notes of Esther Pond Smith (1899-1988) on early Pullman businesses in WCHS Archives.

7 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., June 24, 1927, p. 1.

8 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., June 10, 1927, p. 1.

9 She was mother of 1950s-60s Pullman High School teacher Catherine Friel, wife of noted long-time WSU coach Jack Friel. *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Dec. 9, 1927, p. 1.

10 A full report of the inaugural banquet was given in the *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Jan. 6, 1928, p. 5.

11 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Jan. 20, 1929, p. 10.

12 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Sept. 28, 1928, p. 3; Fri., Aug. 2, 1929, 2nd Sec., p. 3; and Fri. Feb. 26, 1932, p. 10.

13 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., April 18, 1930, p. 1. The others were children born to Mrs. Walter Budge, wife of the chief clerk and auditor, and Mrs. Kenneth Powers, wife of the night clerk.

14 Interview with Chester and Gertrude Dissmore, July 10, 2008.

15 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., March 1, 1940, p. 1. This was recalled by a relative of the author who was a grade school student in Pullman at the time. The story apparently was widely known in Pullman.

16 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., March 8, 1940, p. 4 and Fri., March 29, 1940, p. 6; a Program for the April 25 event is in the possession of the author's mother, Blanche King, who attended the event.

17 From her obituary, *Moscow-Pullman Daily News*, Fri., May 30, 2008, p. 4A. She also worked for a time in the 1940s as a waitress in Pullman's Top Notch Café on Main Street.

18 Interview with Don Clarke, July 10, 2008.

19 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Aug. 28, 1942, p. 1. Seven years later in 1949, Roberts was shot during Pullman's infamous "Easter Massacre." Despite this and his apparent passion for sweets, he lived to age 100.

20 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Sept. 11, 1942, p. 7.

21 Washington Hotel stationery of this time (owned by the author) lists Walmer as manager.

22 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Nov. 27, 1942, p. 1, and Fri., June 11, 1943, p. 1.

23 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Oct. 27, 1944, p. 1. City bonds were issued, and retired, to help fund its operation.

24 Hinman's wife, Rose, served as a hostess in the Hotel in the 1940s, a fact recalled by the author's mother, Blanche King, who knew Rose when both were WSC students.

25 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Dec. 26, 1947, p. 5.

26 *Pullman Herald*, Fri., Feb. 18, 1949, p. 8.

27 Some years later, the Oct. 1, 1959 *Pullman Herald* re-characterized the transaction not as a resale to Gannon, but a repossession after its sale to the four "theatre men" fell through. Gannon, in this 1959 account, thus reclaimed ownership and later sold out to Crossler, who later sold to Metzgar and Kaser.

28 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Fri., Sept. 4, 1953, p. 46; *Pullman Herald*, Thurs., Dec. 31, 1953, p. 4 of Special Section.

29 *Pullman Herald*, Thurs., Nov. 5, 1953, p. 1.

30 *Pullman Herald*, Thurs. Jan. 14, 1954, p. 1.

31 *Buck Bailey: The Making of a Legend*, by Weldon B. "Hoot" Gibson, Pullman, Washington State Alumni Association, 1989, pp. 138-139.

32 It fell to his friend and colleague Lewis McNew to clean out his long-occupied room at the Washington Hotel, which was filled to the brim with books, photographs, and other possessions.

33 *Pullman Herald*, Thurs., Jan. 8, 1959, Third Section, p. 1.

34 Interview with Don Clarke, July 10, 2008.

35 *Pullman Herald*, Thurs., Dec. 16, 1965, p. 7.

36 Interview with former Pullman resident, Michael J. Trull, Jan. 18, 2008.

37 Interview with Don Clarke, July 10, 2008.

38 The new building for the Seattle First National Bank at Pullman, with 8,750 square feet of floor space on two levels, opened in less than a year. Its ribbon-cutting ceremonies were held on Saturday, June 16, 1973.

39 *Pullman Herald*, Thurs., June 29, 1972, p. 1.



WHEN FENCES CRISS-CROSSED THE PALOUSE

By Glenn Leitz

Palouse landscapes have always been the subject of wide acclaim. The sweeping vistas of dune-like hills are interspersed with beautiful streams and valleys that add their own special beauty. Then, the unique features of the glacial flooding that long ago sculpted the edges of this terrain have added another dimension to the Palouse panorama, making it a very distinctive place.

For many decades when the Palouse region was first being settled and converted to agriculture, there was a unique man-made feature that became a part of the landscape. Today that feature is almost forgotten, but then fences criss-crossed the region in every direction. These ubiquitous structures seemed to stitch the fields firmly to the landscape, and at that time they seemed to be such an integral part of the Palouse scene that one could hardly believe that things would ever change.

Barbed or woven wire fences were erected on almost every farm boundary. Within the farm borders more fences divided the property into multiple fields. Roads and right-of-ways were also fenced, along with farm lanes, farmsteads, and other miscellaneous areas. These pervasive fences were an integral and seemingly permanent part of the rural scene.

Farming was still relatively small scale, and a variety of livestock was a primary feature on almost every farm. Horses and mules provided the power component of agriculture, and cattle, hogs, and sheep were also present on many farms. This animal population required fenced pastures and fields.



The livestock provided a diversification in farming that is seldom seen today. Farm work patterns and seasonal activities were also much different. An important economic aspect of that era was that the large acreages devoted to livestock were unavailable for grain production or cash crops. This was one of many factors that made farming so much of a different business than it is today. Now, diversification has given way, and specialization is the primary focus. As a result, fences have little if any usefulness to present-day farming, and the once trademark feature of the fence has almost slipped into oblivion.

Fencing Technology

Fences were capital and labor intensive. Cost began with the basic posts and wire. At first, wooden posts were available in the nearby mountains that bordered the Palouse. Often cutting fence posts was part of a wintertime activity that was combined with acquiring the year's supply of wood for fuel. A little later in time, local businesses acquired posts from more distant sources to meet the local demand.

Fence wire was either barbed or woven. Farms with hogs or sheep needed woven wire on the bottom course of the fence to make an effective enclosure. This feature added a significant additional cost and labor factor to the job.

An array of special tools and accessories was another requirement. Post-hole diggers, wire stretchers, corner braces, and staples to affix the wires made up a sizeable list. Some time later, steel posts and the components of electric fencing added another level of cost and technology to fencing work.





Constructing fences in the hilly Palouse needed a considerable degree of extra work and effort. Skills that might suffice to build fences in leveler regions could quite easily fall short in this steep terrain. Stretching the wires to get just the right degree of tension and the careful installation of the posts and corner braces were real challenges and more than a little frustrating at times. Returning to a fencing site and seeing that a section of fence had succumbed to forces of gravity and tension that left it swinging in the air over a ditch or collapsed on the lee of a hill was an experience not soon forgotten! Winter snow drifts also often resulted in broken posts and wires at sites that could be particularly difficult to repair.

Constructing the number and variety of gates for all of these fences was another test of ingenuity and skill. A simple gate to allow a team of horses or a vehicle to pass could be fairly basic. Larger and wider gates to allow the passage of big farm equipment between fields and roads would be notably more complicated. To keep the gate posts anchored and the longer sections of the gate from sagging was an interesting challenge. Finally, the techniques needed to allow the release of the tension necessary to open or close a big gate could be a bit of a head scratcher as well.

Opening and closing gates was a regular and tiresome part of farm life. How easily farm gates could be opened and closed, how much they were prone to sag or tangle, these were important questions for the property owner. A source of continual amazement was how quickly livestock seemed to sense and discover that a gate had been left open. Chasing wandering stock was never a pleasant chore, but it was a common one.

Some Aesthetic Characteristics of the Fence Age

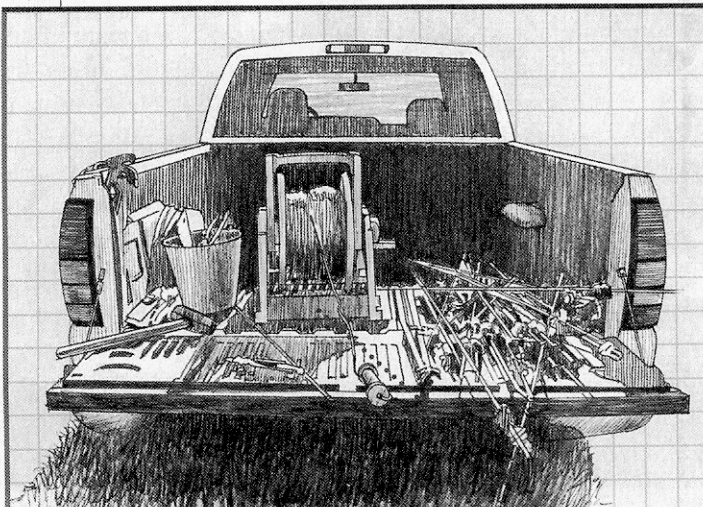
There were some features of the fence age that bring back pleasant memories. The country's features had more character and beauty in some important ways. The fence rows and right-of-ways created habitat for a variety of plants and animals that connected back to the original prairie. Balsam root (sunflowers), wild rose, service berry, chokecherry, and the exquisitely beautiful and delicate flowers of early spring – these were part of a scene whose memory can still stir emotions. These little areas were also the last refuge of the prairie chicken and the native songbirds. Their melodic song and vivid color were features that are now sorely missed.

A variety of four-footed animals also shared these areas. The native cottontail rabbit and its cousin, the long-legged, long-eared jack rabbit were readily seen. Badgers, gophers, the native vole (mouse) had their burrows here. Two other four-legged denizens of the region also made their base here. They would prove to be adaptable, aggravating, and long-term pests. Who does not know the wily coyote? From its early foothold in the western United States, the coyote has spread over most of North America. It likes the diverse “supermarket” of food provided by man and thrives on the modern scene. The local ground squirrel never traveled so far nor has it persisted so freely, but it did like the appearance of grain farming and became one of farming's most notable pests. The ground squirrel deserves some further comment here.

The Columbian Ground Squirrel is the specific name of our local rodent, and it has an important place in many annals and sagas of the region. The arrival of grain farming suited the ground squirrels completely. They quickly began the



HANDY DEVICES



increase in numbers that makes them a major scourge and economic pest. From their refuges in the roadsides and fence rows, they would move into adjacent grain fields and create an amazing amount of damage to the crops.

A variety of control measures came into play. Poison bait was scattered in the fields, and lethal gasses were pumped into the burrows. These measures were only partly effective. Another long-time control technique was practiced that created some very special memories for the Palouse country natives. Some of us still have vivid memories of “squirrel trap lines.”

For decades, the rituals of spring included setting out squirrel trap lines and school-age kids “checking the trap lines.” One of the plusses of this duty could be the opportunity for the younger generation to earn some extra income. Usually the youngsters would be paid a bounty for each squirrel caught. Usually the squirrel’s tail needed to be brought in to provide a tally of the trapper’s success. Shooting squirrels with a .22 caliber rifle was also an almost universal right of passage for every farm boy.

Eventually diseases became fairly prevalent and seemed to be an important factor in diminishing the ground squirrel problem. All of these factors had varying degrees of success. However, even today scattered colonies of these pests still exist in some locations of wasteland or pastures. Here they can still manage to present an element of drama. These scattered survivors of all the battles and warfare that has

been directed their way may still try to stage a “guerilla” attack on a nearby field. At times this will still cause a present-day farmer or rancher to rant, “Are those blankety-blank squirrels still trying to make a comeback?” Some conflicts seem destined to never end.

Memories of the Area’s Fence Removal

By the 1950s and 1960s, fence removal had come into full sway. Technology and farm size expansion meant old fences and right-of-ways were being cleared away. Bigger machinery was leading to bigger fields, and farm units often consisted of tracts miles apart. Now any remaining fences were only a nuisance.





When farm schedules permitted, miles and miles of fence were on the top of the “to do” list to be cleared away. This was a tedious and difficult undertaking. For those of us who were involved in this task, it left a variety of recollections – not all of them pleasant. Removing the tenacious staples that held the old and rusty wire to cracked and weathered posts was the first challenge. Then would begin the task of rolling up the old fence row debris into ungainly rolls of twisted and broken wire, rose brush, and a variety of other vegetation that cluttered the fence rows. Punctured gloves, torn clothes, and varying degrees of bloodshed were the lot of the poor drudge who had to be resigned to these struggles.

Removing fence wire and other odds and ends from numerous sites where erosion had buried them at various depths was another exhausting struggle. The old posts, often rotten and broken, required a variety of techniques to loosen them and wrest them from their long vigil as sentinels of a landscape now destined for change.

Present-day farmers know first hand the uncanny ability of these old fence staples to cause an unusual degree of mischief. Staples could be pulled from posts by a variety of weather stresses, and naturally a sizeable number were lost in the final fence removal. These old fence staples can still be picked up by the seed openers on grain drills. This effectively stops the disks on the openers from turning. This blocked flow of seed will leave an unsightly “skip” or bare spot in the plant row. Murphy’s Law says this always happens near a road where fellow farmers can see the skip and comment on it. Then, in addition, there will also be a wasted pile of seed when the drill opener is relieved of this blockage and begins to turn again. How long this phenomenon will persist is still an unanswered puzzle.

An Environmental Message from the Old Fence Rows?

With the hilly terrain and the weather patterns that occur in the Palouse, there has long been a concern with the region's soil erosion problems. Erosion from water run-off has been the biggest focus and concern, but another slower, and therefore less obvious, force is also at work.

When farm tillage operations are conducted on steep hillsides, the forces of gravity result in the movement of soil downhill. This movement intensifies with the steepness of the slope and the speed of tillage. Today the technology associated with big tractor horsepower has notably increased tillage speed and has accentuated this phenomenon of soil movement down slope.

The most dramatic indicator of this problem may be the old fence rows and property borders. Here these old side-hill field divisions may leave banks or "berms" of soil as high as 15 feet or more.

There is one more field site where this drama is observed, what farmers call "eyebrows." These are areas where steepness or weather factors have resulted in small areas that now lie idle. Here a similar gravity pattern can also build up dramatic soil-out-of-place indicators.

In a historic sense and timeline, the Palouse region's conversion to farming has been just a blink of an eye. One of the lessons of history is that indicators of long-term problems are often addressed slowly, if at all. Perhaps the old fence row sites are examples of problems we should be taking more seriously.

Conclusion

A sense of having journeyed through times of dramatic change is one of the features of both a region and a people growing older. There is a rapidly shrinking generation of Palouse farmers whose eyes brighten and voices quicken when their memories return to the Palouse country's era of fences. When they speak about the challenges of building fences, keeping them in repair, the sense of character they gave to the area, and the final toil of fence removal as farming changed, a special part of history, for a time, still lives on.

Soon these personal remembrances will fade away. Hopefully some of these tales and stories like those recorded here will survive and prove to be still interesting and informative. Hopefully they will pass along a sense of some of the color and the events of a time when fences criss-crossed the Palouse.

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