

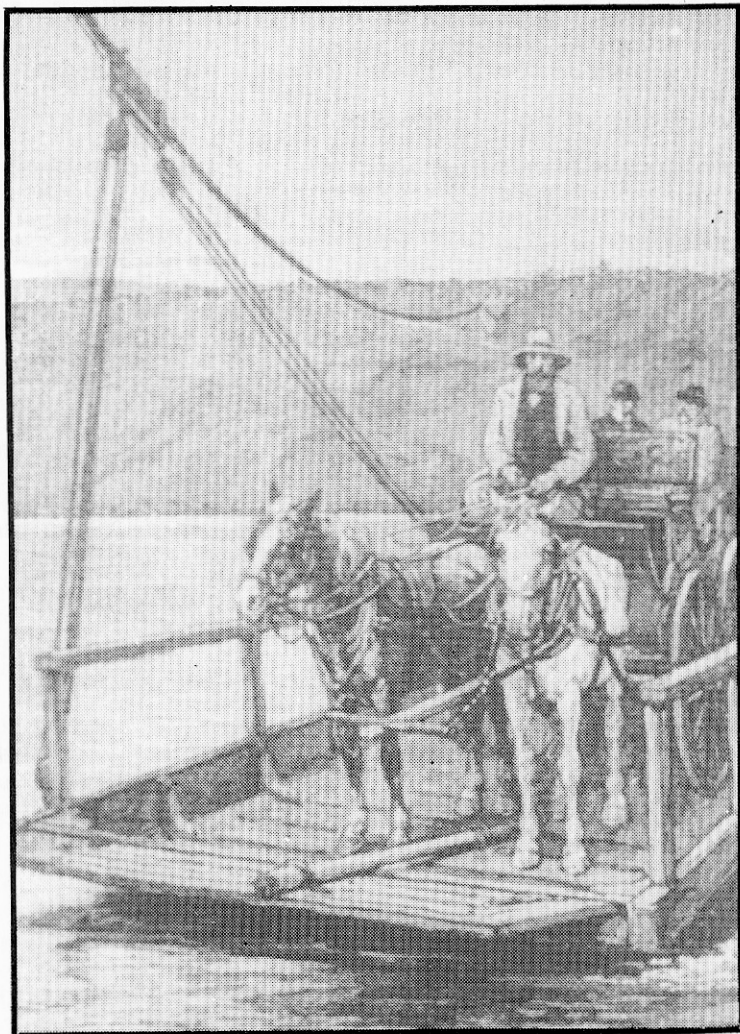
Bunchgrass Historian

Whitman County Historical Society Quarterly

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WHITMAN COUNTY—1884:

An Easterner's View

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Ernest Ingersoll was a journalist and writer who produced a number of travel and descriptive narratives of North America during the later 19th Century.

Kimberly Bradford, a native of Olympia, Washington, attended Washington State University, graduating in 1984. Her essay on Colton during the Great Depression was originally written as a student project.

The Cover

A ferry on an inland river, taken from Ernest Ingersoll's account of travel in Eastern Washington in the early 1880s.

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ARTICLES FOR PUBLICATION

Contributors should send copies of their manuscripts to the editor (at the above listed address). All stories dealing with topics related to Whitman County history will be considered for publication.

Wheat Fields of the Columbia

by
Ernest Ingersoll*

I.—East of the Mountains

A glance at the map will remind the reader that Oregon and Washington Territory are divided into eastern and western halves by the Cascade Mountains. The western side of this "divide" is called the Coast, and the people who live there speak of the other side as the country "east of the mountains." This general phrase has now come to have specific application to the basin of the Columbia, a plateau region drained by the middle part of that great stream and its tributaries from the westward, such as the Yakima and Okanagon, and the lower part of the Snake River. To understand this thoroughly the reader in the Atlantic States should consult some modern map of this northwestern corner of the Union, whose features have only recently been accurately known and cartographed.

Until some of the projected railways through passes of the Cascades shall have made an appearance outside of surveyors' note-books, the only avenue from the coast to the plains or plateaus east of the mountains is the Columbia River.

Half a century has not yet gone by since a canoe trip of two weeks' duration was accounted good progress from Fort Vancouver to the Dalles, much time being lost in making the long portage at the Cascades, and in laboriously dragging the emptied canoe along the edge of the boiling rapids to the slack-water above. Thirty years ago small stern-wheeled steamboats began to run from Portland to the Cascades. There passengers and freight were transported by a wooden tramway to the other steamboats that carried them up to the Dalles, where a second portage was necessary. The next advance was the replacing of the old tram way by a railroad, and later by the construction of a railway from the Dalles to Walla Walla.

All this river traffic was in the hands of the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company, which was rivalled at its ocean end by the Pacific Steamship Company, running

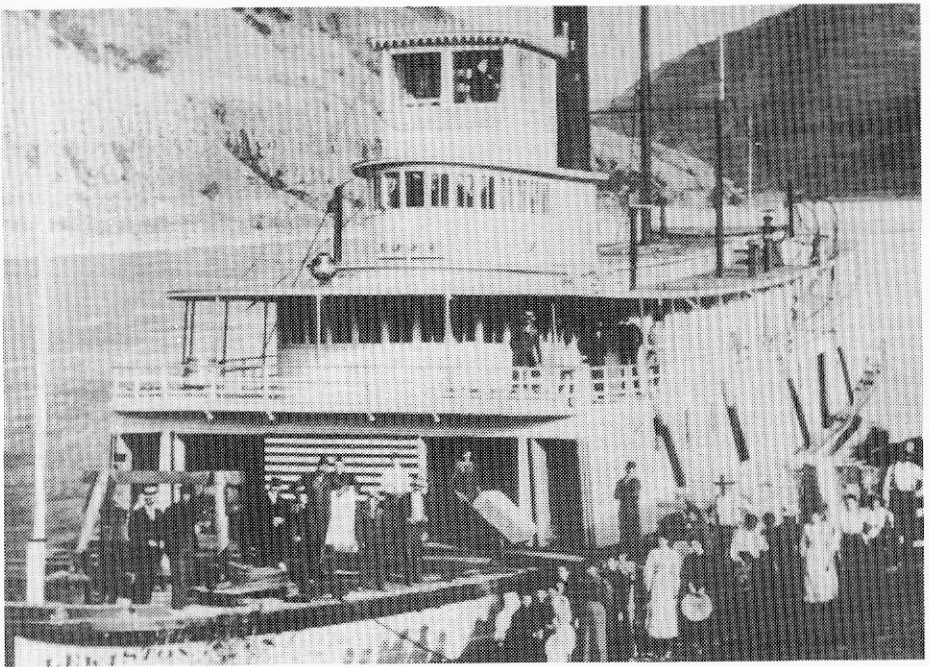
* This article, which appeared in the June/November 1884 number of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, is reprinted here in its entirety. We thank the editor of *Harper's* magazine, Lewis Lapham, for his kind permission to republish this essay.

boats between Portland and San Francisco, and eastwardly by the pretensions, if not the actual presence, of the Northern Pacific. Within the past few years, however, great changes have occurred. Seeing the advantage that might follow a union of these local interests in transportation and development with the transcontinental line of the Northern Pacific, which his genius was carrying to a successful completion, Mr. Henry Villard, of New York, secured control and substantial coalition of the ocean-going business of the Pacific Steamship Company, the river traffic and detached railways of the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company, and of the rights and introductory construction of the Northern Pacific Company at this end. It happens at present, therefore, that the whole transportation system of Oregon and Washington, both east and west of the mountains, acts in unison. There are now, therefore, a continuous railway from Portland, Oregon, to Minnesota; a line southward from the Columbia to Baker City, Oregon, to meet the road proceeding westward from Granger, Wyoming; and several short "feeders" extended into the agricultural region where the great Snake River approaches the Columbia. Portland and San Francisco are connected by the Oregon and California Railway, traversing the long hollows between the Coast Range and the Sierra Nevada. To these should be added a fourth means of ingress to the public lands of the Columbia Basin—the ocean steamers on the Pacific, since thus will come many travellers from Europe, *via* the Atlantic steamers to Aspinwall and across the Isthmus.

It was my fortune recently to make a trip through this basin, with good opportunities to examine what the region contained attractive to emigrants, and I have thought my experiences worth the telling.

II.—*Around Walla Walla*

Among the earlier immigrants into Oregon, thirty years ago, a few halted on the eastern skirts of the "blue hills" that had so long guided them across the wearisome plains. When a settlement became fixed there, the Indians massacred it, and war began. The government established a military post amid the sands of Wallula, but soon moved it a dozen miles up the Walla Walla River to a beautiful site among rolling green prairies, where it exists today as one of the pleasantest of all our army posts. Under this protection it rapidly grew up a community of farmers, tilling the valleys and creek-bottoms, scattering more widely with increasing numbers and assured safety, until now a district is covered by civilization stretching irregularly from the Columbia River southward to Pendleton, thence eastward along the base of the Blue Mountains to Lewiston, Idaho. This tract lies wholly south of the Snake River, partly in Oregon and partly in Washington Territory. It is a hundred miles long by an average of perhaps forty miles in breadth, and contains not far from 25,000 people. In addition, to the southward, there are the fertile Wallowa and the Grande Ronde valleys of Oregon, lying within circling spurs of the Blue Mountains; and also the long strip of arable country between the Blue Mountains and the Cascade Range, through which flow John Day's and the Des Chutes rivers. I do not know how many thousands of acres or square miles of cultivable soil these separate and hill-bordered patches would make if united; but two or three Atlantic States could be made up out of them without any trouble.



Steamer Lewiston, 1890s. Photographed loading at Bishop on the Snake River, this steamer is typical of transportation described by Ernest Ingersoll in the 1880's.

Down across the upper portion of the Blue Mountains, from Umatilla *via* Pendleton and the Grande Ronde, there is a railway which gives access to all the western part of this region, and furnishes a quick outlet for its products both eastward and westward. Elsewhere ingress is had by the railway from Portland to Walla Walla, and thence by branches to Dixie, to Dayton, and across to the Snake River at Riparia, whence steamboats ascend to Lewiston, Idaho, while stages run across the country in all directions to remote settlements.

The whole of this great track, though nowhere flat, is comparatively level, except where it reaches up into the foot-hills, or is crossed by long ridges, like that between Walla Walla and Dayton. The first settlers took the bottom-lands because they held their greenness longest and were easiest of cultivation. The streams here and there showed old beaver-dams, and were bordered by broad thickets of willows and cottonwoods convenient to "slash." The older farms are in such localities. Before long, however, adventurous spirits, finding that irrigation was unnecessary, made experiments in planting upon the round tops of the hills, whose yellow backs lay hot under the sun between the river copses and the mountain woods. The tufaceous soil turned up by the plough was dark and rich, and the yield outranked the best acres along the creek-side. The hills were many and high, sufficing for all the wants of the scant population during many years, so that the wide level benches that lay between the foothills and the prairies—middle lands, light-soiled, dry, and dusty, covered with sorry bunch-grass and sad rabbit-weed—were neglected, and came to be considered worthless, and were to be had almost for the asking.

One day about seven years ago a young man came into Walla Walla driving all his wealth in the shape of a span of horses and an old wagon. A day or two later he was



busy hauling flour to Wallula, which he continued until he had saved a little money and won a little credit. Walla Walla stands some miles out in the plain, and none of its plentiful shade trees grew there naturally. Seeing the demand for fire-wood in the village, he built a small flume from the nearest wooded foot-hill, and brought down cord-wood or small timbers more cheaply than they could be drawn by horses. The profits of this, together with his practice as a physician, in which respect he had now had time to prove himself, made enough money to enable him to try an experiment in agriculture, namely, the cultivation of the intermediate bench lands. Taking up 160 acres, he sowed wheat, and his success was so encouraging that he enlarged his operations until his crop of 1881 was no less than 80,000 bushels from 2000 acres of despised "rabbit-weed"—an average of forty bushels to the acre. This experiment has shown that the benches are nearly, if not quite, as good as the uplands or creek-bottoms. The average crop of the best uplands, taking a long series of years together, is thirty bushels. This is of wheat, scarcely anything else being raised, not for lack of ability—oats and potatoes are especially successful—but because there is so much more ready money in wheat, for which there is always a market. Here, too, the dangers attending so exclusive a method of farming are lessened, for there has never yet been a failure of crops at Walla Walla, though absence of rain now and then shortens the yield to half its proper amount. So strong is the soil, also, that any manuring is not yet thought of, and one farm was pointed out to me where for eighteen successive years good crops had been produced. The farmers, nevertheless, are more and more generally adopting the "summer fallow" plan as a precaution against too great depletion of

their soil. Another bit of economy is the use of "headers" rather than the ordinary mowers and reapers, the long stubble remaining after the harvest being burned, and thus returning to the soil in ashes the greater part of the minerals drawn into the straw during the previous half-year. Unfortunately, however, here is a large class of ignorant and shiftless farmers, "old-timers" for the most part, who are heedless of these far-seeing precautions.

What I have said applies to the whole region between the Blue Mountains and the dry plateaus that begin at the Idaho line.

Besides Walla Walla, there are half a dozen thriving, progressive farming centres, all connected by railway or stage lines, having the telegraph, a daily mail, local newspapers, and other appurtenances of civilization. The heavy storms of midwinter, mantling the face of the earth in snow four or five feet deep, and sinking the mercury away below zero for weeks together, isolate these communities sometimes, but not for protracted intervals.

III.—Up Snake River

The railway from Walla Walla struck Snake River about ninety miles above its mouth, at a station called Riparia, but known to the people of the region as Texas Ferry. The station and steamboat landing consisted here, as elsewhere in this region, of an immense wharf-boat or covered scow moored at the shore. Beside it a railway track ran upon a long incline down to the very lowest water mark, so that as the river sank or rose, and the boat's level altered accordingly, freight-cars would still stand even with her deck. The steamer proved to be a large, handsome craft, receiving a cargo of merchandise for the country stores, supplies of bran and such feed for cattle, and much agricultural machinery. It was a very hot day, but a breeze coming down the canyon made the sheltered upper deck a comfortable place to sit and watch the clever way in which the men handled the bulky freight in the narrow limits of the forward gangway.

This used to be the crossing-place for all the lower Palouse region, and the ferry did a good business, but now it is of small consequence. It consisted of a wire rope stretched across the river over a tripod on each bank high enough to keep it out of the way of the steamboats. Suspended to this wire by two pulleys, the small flat-bottomed ferry-boat ran across by the force of the current, the right sheer being obtained by a windlass in the boat, which lengthened or shortened the guy-ropes at the will of the ferryman. This proved to be the type of all the ferries.

The shores are lava hills that rise steeply from the water—so steeply that here no room is left for a cattle trail or beach. Maroon-red level cliff ledges, broken through by angular ravines, and connected, one terrace above the other, by grass-grown slopes or a natural riprapping of fallen fragments, stand with faces almost vertical for two or three hundred feet above the river, and then round off into golden-edged domes of sun-ripened turf. Everything in this deep river gorge appears as dry and useless as possible, but wheat is growing right on the brow of those bluffs, where the soil is rich, though the crops are always exposed to suffer from drought.

We cast loose and began our voyage upstream soon after noon.

The first landing was a curious sight. The cutting away of the bluff by a water gully had formed a bar of sand and gravel, and ploughed out a passage up to the table-land. The nose of the steamer—a flat-bottomed, run-on-a-heavy-dew style of boat—was pushed right up on the beach, whereupon the current quickly drifted her stern inshore,

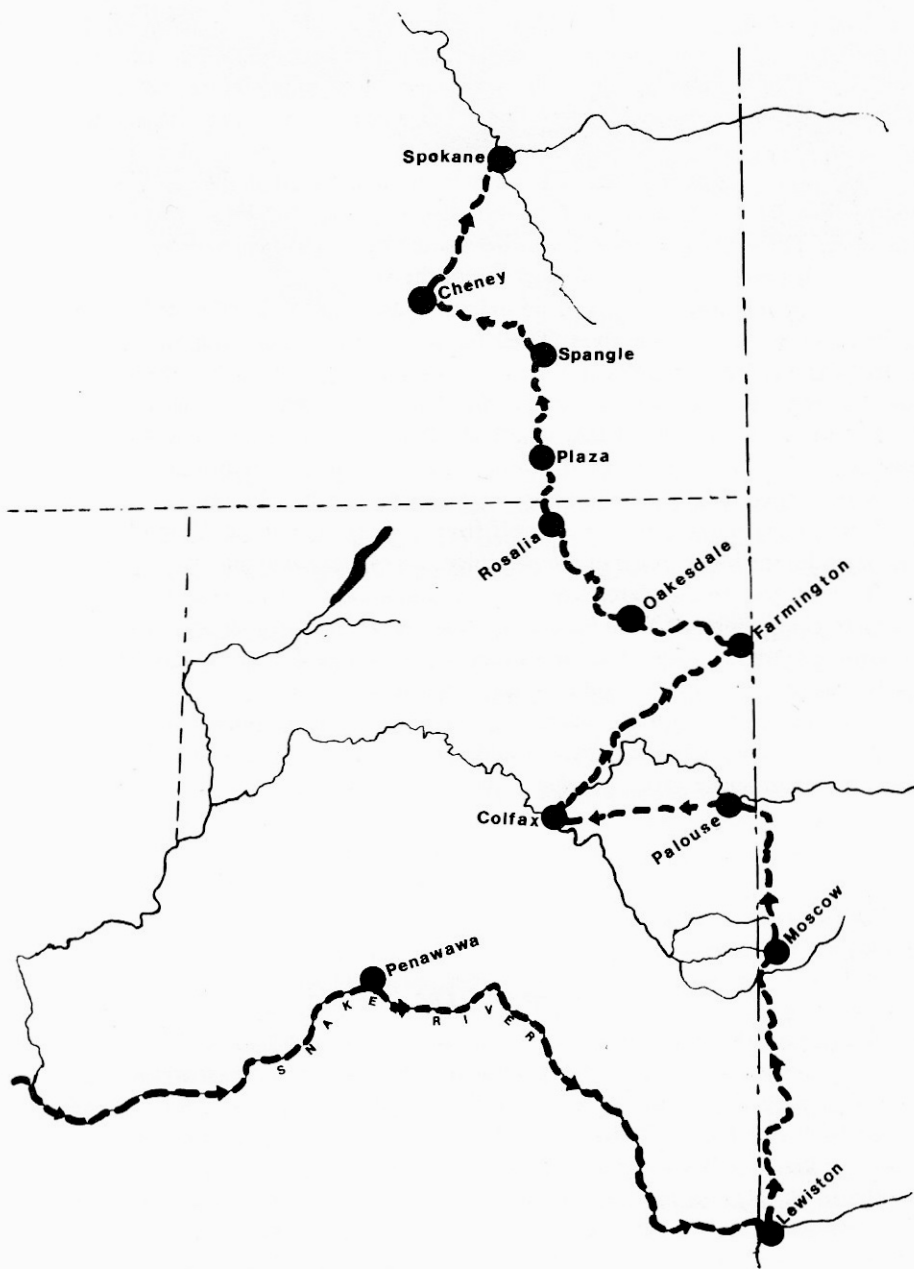
and the plank was run out. A small shed stood near the margin, in which some bags of salt were stored; otherwise every kind of freight, boxes, bales, barrels, packages of furniture, sacks of meal, crates of wooden ware, and the brilliant red wheels and woodwork of threshers and other machinery, all in pieces, lay scattered higgledy-piggledy, and half buried in the sand. Gradually these things would be carted back to their owners over the hills. Meanwhile the weather was to be trused, and nobody would disturb them.

This landing was named New York Bar by a company who once proposed to go into placer-mining here, but the diggings were soon abandoned to the patient Chinamen, who are only too glad to be let peacefully alone with second pick at anything. We could see them working as we passed, half a dozen or so, hard to distinguish from the bowlders among which they delved. There is gold to be taken out of all the gravel banks and island bars along the whole river, and also down the Columbia.

So the afternoon wore on, the sun blazing down, the scenery repeating itself exactly as we turned each bend in this truly snake-like river—long, level, red-brown escarpments like ruined walls fallen forward here and there under the pressure of the bulging earth behind, or rounded bluffs, whose gleaming yellow intensified the clear azure of the filtered sky, crowned with massive fortifications and pillared domes of lava, whose rifts and shadows were painted in ultramarine and indigo. Thus the view was limited between high horizons scarcely a mile apart, while the river filled the bottom of the winding canon.



STREET SCENE, LEWISTON, IDAHO.



Route of Ernest Ingersoll's trip through the Palouse Country in the early 1880s. The "features have only recently been accurately known and cartographed," Ingersoll noted.

At Penawawa the stage rode crosses from Colfax to Dayton and Walla Walla, following up the long dry bed of Dead Man's Hollow. This ferry, like the others, made a great deal of money before the Northern Pacific Railway turned all the merchandise from this route. Here were two or three extremely fine orchards, and pleasant homes surrounded by trees and gardens, for which they were indebted to a spring near the top of the hill.

Recent farming on the highlands of the Snake has proved very successful. Meanwhile the plateaus are devoted to stock-raising and sheep-herding, affording fine pasturage. The bottoms are utilized in growing wheat, which is cut and stacked for hay, little timothy being sowed here. This wheat hay is to be fed in the snowy winter to the sheep.

The breezy evening found us at Almota, a village with shops and hotels, and a wharf which is the landing place for the large farming district about Moscow and westward. There is a government weather station here, and two youths were exchanging wig-wag practice with signal-flags across the river.

In this neighborhood, again, were to be seen colonies of Chinese washing gold out of the gravelly shores of the river. Their houses were little holes dug in the bank, and roofed with just enough poles and brush to sustain a layer of earth and keep the dews out. The life they lived was far more comfortless and savage and isolated than that of the Indian on the opposite bank, who had his family, his horses, and his neighbors always with him, and who no doubt enjoys himself, according to his lights, from Easter to Christmas, enduring the bad season of midwinter as best he can.

It was utter night when we cast off from the last landing at Granite Point, and passed under the black frown of the precipice. The water swishing by the prow flashed a moment in the yellow glare of our low head-light, and swept back into the velvety, noiseless gloom behind. No wind made moans or music through the wire cordage of the steamer's upper works, and the stillness of sleep settled upon the boat as I smoked my last warm pipeful in the pilot-house, studying

“the deep sapphire overhead, Distinct with vivid stars inlaid.”

After this, cool oblivion, and an awaking in the bright morning at Lewiston, at the junction of the Snake and Clearwater rivers.

IV.—Across The Palouse

The agricultural region north of the Snake River is known as the Palouse country, or simply as the Palouse, after the name of its central river. Stages traverse it, carrying the mail in several directions, and I chose the route from Lewiston to Cheney, a station on the Northern Pacific Railway, the direction being due north, and right along the boundary between Washington and Idaho.

Five o'clock in the morning was the hour for starting, the vehicle proving to be an open two-seated and badly used-up buckboard. With great joy I saw a trio of the mangiest of “bagmen” drive away in the opposite direction, and found that my companion was to be a young Californian, acting as advance agent for The Man Mystery—a magician, contortionist, etc., who was making a tour of the region, “his wonders to perform” before the excited frontiersmen. Driving to the brink of the Clearwater,



HARVESTING SCENE IN THE
PALOUSE COUNTRY.

whose current is blue, while that of the Snake is yellow, we shouted to the ferryman opposite, who calmly finished his breakfast, and then leisurely steered us across by means of his wire-suspended flat-boat. He had eighteen dogs, all of which, "without distinction of race, color, or previous condition," came down to welcome our bark with theirs.

Here, too, stood a tall, sunburned maiden, straight as a wheat stalk. She had just alighted from a big black horse, and now climbed up beside the driver, who evidently considered us two passengers in the low seat behind entirely unnecessary to his happiness. Her costume was well adapted to her journey—a broad-brimmed and badly cracked chip hat, a double-caped water-proof, rusty with sunshine and dust, two green Balmoral skirts, and (outside the water-proof cloak) a riding-skirt of faded alpaca, which, when she took her seat on the buckboard, she wrapped around her waist like a sash. That she had a better hat, however, was manifested by the shape of a parcel carefully carried in her lap.

Before us loomed a hill that it would require two and a half hours to climb, in order to get up to the plateau level, so deep was the river-bed sunken. The road wound here and there, wherever the grade was best. Expanding before us as we went higher and higher, all the landscape glowed, under the beams of the rising sun, with broad color—a mingled tone of the yellow of straw and the grayish-green of hay, with cobalt lying solid in the angular masses of shadow near at hand, or washed evenly and almost impalpably over the misty background. It soon appeared that our new passenger was a school-mistress, and wished she were back in California, not liking Idaho. The advance agent and she discovered they had acquaintances in common in the Sacramento Valley, and were soon very talkative together, whereupon the driver became sulky, and devoted himself to giving me geographical information, none of which was new.

The deep ravine in the bare and gravelly bluff along which we were climbing was covered with hundreds of narrow sheep paths, dividing the face of the hill into a multitude of minute terraces. On our side we could hardly trace these through the weeds, though at a distance they were as plain as the lines of shingling on a roof. Great



Palouse City, late 1880s.

—Washington State University Libraries

flocks of sheep passing back and forth in spring and again in the autumn, between their high summer pastures and the sheltered fields along the river, keep these tiny trails well trodden.

As the summit approached, a vast scene was spread before us,

“grassy, wild, and bare,

Wide, wild, and open to the air.”

At the base of the bluff the two rivers came down to join currents, and break through the jagged indigo of the canyon just visible at the right. In the south some mountain silhouettes were painted faintly on the far horizon, and right underneath us the orchards and white houses of Lewiston and the green meadows along the Clearwater formed bright notes in the landscape. All the rest was a treeless plateau, but a plateau through which the water had cut tortuous and confluent lines of drainage, beginning far back as mere pencil scratches, like the outermost twigs of a tree, and uniting into deeper and deeper channels, until the great gulches opened into the river gorge. All these rivulets, brooks, and winding river-courses were now dry and brown, with sere grass to their very beds, and between them lay rounded ridges like well-shaven lawns, as smooth and close-cropped and tawny as a pig’s back. We were 1800 feet above the town, the school-mistress said, and only now could we begin to appreciate how deeply sunken, broad, and forcible a stream was this great river of the Snake. Its course could be traced for a score of miles—a vast cliff-guarded chasm ploughed far through the basalts that here and there protruded from underneath their thick blanket of soil and



Colfax in the 1880s.

Whitman County Historical Society

herbage. I have said ploughed, but that is only partially true, for one could easily see how the edges of the bluffs along each side of both the Snake and the Clearwater were higher than the general level of the plateaus back of them, showing that subterranean forces had forced the earth's crust apart along this line, furnishing an irregular drainage channel, to which all Idaho contributes.

Walking slowly up the long hill in the freshness of the morning, and much of the time in the shade, there had been little discomfort; but here on the summit began the "heat and burden of the day." The sun blazed down straight from the cloudless vault, and was reflected back from an unbounded area of seared plain. The light soil, powdered by incessant travel and prolonged drought, was kicked into a dense cloud, hiding the horses' feet, and poured off the wheels into our faces and over our clothes. The glib tongue of the school-mistress was kept fast shut in her mouth, which she dared not open in the blinding dust, and the driver substituted touches of his whip-lash for speech in addressing his team.

The people of this neighborhood were largely Norwegians, most of whom had previously dwelt somewhere else on the Pacific coast. Their houses were chiefly built of logs, which they had hauled ten or twenty miles from the hills, and the walls inclined inward somewhat, as I have seen represented in pictures of settlements. There was not the least appearance of an attempt to be nice about any of the houses, and almost no

bushes or trees were set out. As the small, comfortless school building came into view on a distant eminence, the school-mistress began to talk about the difficulties of her position.

"Most of my pupils are as old as I am, and it is hard to behave like a teacher with them. And stupid? Lordy!"

I could see by the way her two hands went up that their dullness was immeasurable by words.

"I guess some of 'em are pretty smart in their own lingo; but all they want of our teaching is just enough to read a little and make change. As soon as these boys get grown, you see, they're going away off a thousand miles or so, buy some land, and go to farming, just as their fathers did. They don't need much savvey for that."

Nobody was to be seen around the hot little log school-house, the windows of which were boarded up, showing how the boys had smashed the glass. It looked pretty lonely for the young woman, who waved us good-by with her big hat as we came to the crest of the next hill. The driver was much affected. "I wouldn't mind goin' to school myself this afternoon," he signed. "I think, if I were to try, I could make it interesting for the teacher."

Arrived at Moscow for dinner, we looked very much like darkies or coal-heavers. Moscow is a lively little town, doing a large trade with the farmers.

The advance agent thought this town, having so large a tributary population, would be a good place for his man, and so he "billed" it, which I learned is the proper expression for posting announcements and arranging the preliminaries of any exhibition. A lounge at the hotel took vast interest in the proceedings, and promised him a big house, as though he "carried the county in his breeches pocket," like a politician.

"We 'ain't had a show since 'way back, and every feller that can raise the bullion 'll come, and bring his girl. Better not have any reserved seats. Charge everybody four bits straight, and the kids two bits. That 'll fetch 'em. Don't you fret. We'll whoop 'er up for the Professor."

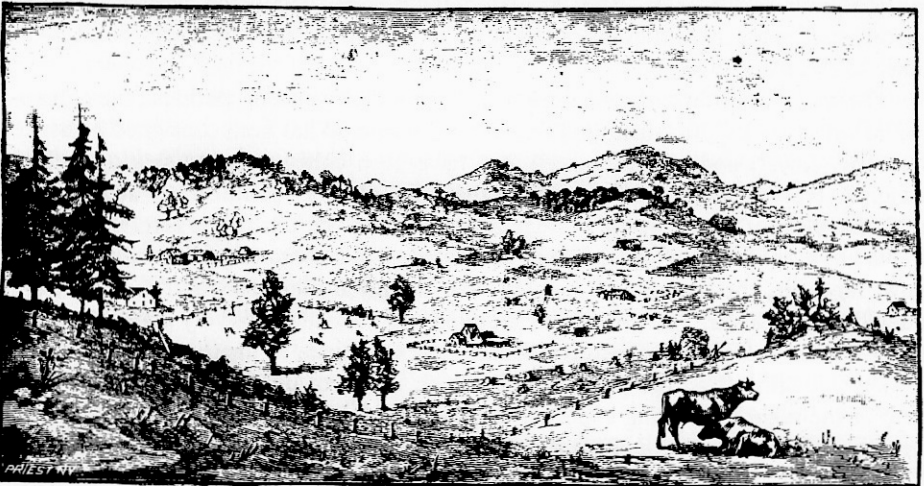
The same endless succession of rolling hills, farm-covered as far as the eye could reach, continued all the way to the Palouse River—a distance from Lewiston given as forty-five miles; but that is measured in an air line simply by counting the section lines. The road always takes two sides of a triangle, either in going over a hill or around a farm, so that it is much longer in fact, the hot sun and stifling dust not tending to shorten our estimate.

At Palouse City we spent the night. The town is on the river, here a small, swift stream running through a thin growth of yellow pines. The water-power has caused two saw-mills to be built, to which logs are rafted down, and on the steep sides of the ravine a rough village of a hundred people or so has grown up, forming a supply point for the neighborhood. It has dawned upon them, however, that the rugged little canyon is no place for the town, so they are picking it up bodily and moving a mile down the creek to where it may stand on a level. Colfax, a village of considerable size, not far away, had been burned just before my visit, and it was expected that the dwellers there would not rebuild, but would come and start afresh at this new town, or else at Endicott. It never occurred to any of these persons that there was any sentiment to hinder their pulling up stakes and moving a town about in this fashion. The whole country is merely laid off in squares. States, counties, towns, farms, are all run by surveyors' lines. Nothing has been brought about by a course of events, or is determined by the

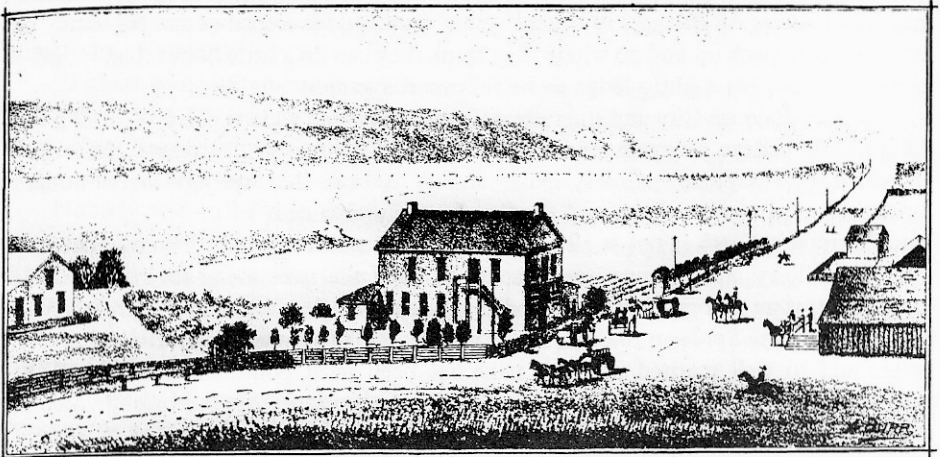
natural boundaries of big-tree, stream, or hill range, as is pleasantly the case in the father-land. Hence there is no character in any district or piece of real estate, nor more hold upon a man's affection than in any other quarter section he might "take up." It is not *home* at all. Nobody has been born, or died, or married there; the owner has not planted hopes along with his orchard, and therefore has none to uproot in the abandonment of his trees. All that sort of thing is yet to come, and it costs him and his family no more pangs to pack up and go where they think they can do a little better than it does a hunter to move his nightly lodge as he follows the game.

Between Palouse City and the railway occurs the same wide expanse of rolling fertile hills and valleys, everywhere dotted with farms. Various small streams, the largest of which is Hangman's Creek, exist, and it is said that springs are abundant throughout the whole region, and good wells easily obtained.

Hangman's Creek is not at all as forbidding as its name, winding its way cheerily through willowy and flower-strewn banks. In 1857 the trees along its banks a little lower down were decorated with the bodies of several ringleaders of a murderous revolt on the part of the Spokane Indians, to whom General Wright administered a defeat so severe and so well merited that this tribe has been most polite and friendly to the whites ever since. The name of the pleasant creek perpetuates this execution, which in Idaho phrase was a "hanging-bee."



VIEW ON THE ROAD FROM GARFIELD TO PALOUSE CITY, WASH. TER.



FARM & BUSINESS PROPERTY OF JAMES S. DAVIS, STEPTOE STATION, WHITMAN CO. W. T.

Two villages north of the Palouse were passed through—Farmington and Spangle—which have a dozen stores and various workshops each, and look forward to a long continuance of their rapid growth. The heaviest establishment in all these villages is the warehouse of the man who sells agricultural implements. These farms—a few of which exceed a thousand acres—require the use of machinery, and every farmer is discontented unless he owns a complete set, with all the latest improvements. This is expensive, for here machinery costs fully twice its price in the Eastern States. It is seldom that the farmer can pay more than a fraction of the cost; but the dealer gives him credit, takes a mortgage on the farm, and charges him one to two per cent a month interest. The farmers don't deserve their good wagons and implements, even on these ruinous terms, for I saw them, in many instances, left out-of-doors to crack and rust.

The methods of farming show nothing extraordinary except, perhaps, the cultivation of wheat for hay, to which end almost the entire crop has been consigned hitherto. Timothy, clover, and alfalfa do well, but have been cultivated very sparingly. The principal crop until recently was flax—the wild plant is plentiful all about these hills—the yield of which would average about fourteen bushels to the acre. It was profitable because of the saving in freight compared with a cargo of grain of equal value. Now, however, the farmers are turning their attention more to wheat and oats; not much barley is raised. The average yield per acre of these grains is very large compared with the East, though by no means reaching the extravagant estimates often published, nor am I judging from the present year, which is one of unusual drought, the total yield of the region not being expected to more than equal last year's crop, in spite of the increased acreage. Drought is the great enemy the farmer has to dread, but no irrigation is considered necessary, and probably lack of grain is to be looked for no more here than in the Prairie States.

Stock-raising was profitable to the first comers, but the rapid filling up and fencing in of the country has limited the possibilities of this. One does not see many cattle, therefore, and fewer horses than formerly, though every farmer has a small band, which are disposed of to drovers, who sell them again to the herdsmen of Wyoming and Colorado, to be used up and mercifully shot after a year or two of cattle-chasing. In the horse and cattle business, but especially the former, the farmers have keen competitors in the Nez Perce Indians, who raise great numbers of ponies, which they sell not only to the cattle men, but also to the Northern Indians—Spokanes, Coeur d'Alenes, Crees, and Flat-heads—who are less favorably situated for horse-breeding. These Indian ponies, and the half-breed scrub stock raised by the white men as well, go by the name of "Kyuses"—derived from a tribe of Indians in northern California with whom the pioneers first began to trade in horseflesh. They are tough, active, often speedy little brutes, but as full of tricks and deviltry as their homely skins will hold.

V.—*The Spokane Region*

The sand and lava along the banks of the Columbia River extend northeastward from the Dalles in a triangular tongue of desert penetrating almost to Coeur d'Alene Lake. Its scenery, as viewed from the car window, is perfectly described by Bert Harte's familiar stanza:

"Just take a look about you: alkali, rock, and sage,
Sage and rock and alkali—ain't it a pretty page?
Sun in the east at mornin', sun in the west at night,
And the shadow of this yere station the only thing moves in sight."

Through this desolation the Northern Pacific Railway, with incredible hardship to its engineers and workmen, has constructed its main line, following an ancient water-course, called the Great Coule. There is no station better than a switch and a telegraph office for two hundred and fifty miles, or all the way from the Dalles to the Spokane Valley. The situation was told very well by an old gentleman as the car drew up at the station consisting of a section-house and a big sign-board, when he said, "The people here get just two drinks of water a day, one when the train goes up, and the other when it comes down."

Nevertheless, in spite of this cheerless aspect of affairs, the sage-brush plains that lie on top of the bluffs bordering the railway are very rich, and beyond them bunchgrass uplands of scarcely less fertility stretch northward and southward (as we have already seen), and are continued west, of the Columbia in the vastly useful valleys and grazing plateaus of the Yakima, and the other drainage slopes of the Cascade Range. All these uplands are being settled upon with amazing rapidity, and are to be yet more eagerly appropriated when the railway connections heretofore explained have made them readily accessible. At Sprague the shops of the Pacific division are established, and a considerable town has sprung up, to which much farm trade will presently go, in addition to the support of the railway mechanics.

At present, however, the next station northeast of Sprague has great advantages. This is Cheney, just now the largest and most active village in eastern Washington.

Cheney was the terminus of my Palouse stage trip, and my first impression of the town was that it was the scene of a military funeral. Getting nearer, the truth appeared. The nucleus of a band was playing before a theatre door, the brazen character of the performance appearing more in the temerity of the musicians than in the nature of their instruments. To make up for this deficiency, tones of thunder were being struck



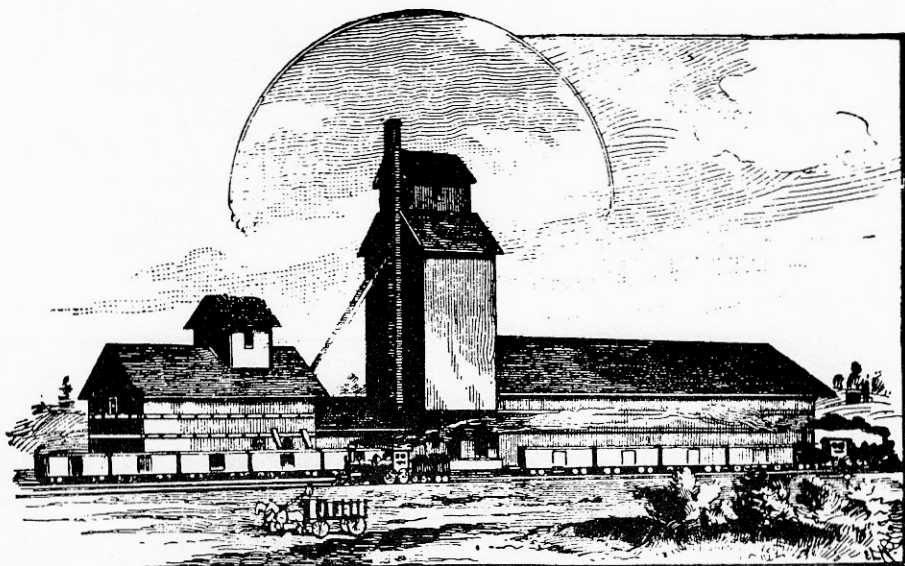
ROSALIA, WASH. TER.

from a big bass-drum by a sad-spirited German, and it was this I had mistaken for the minute-guns of my funeral. Several times the music seemed about to break down, and the musicians to turn and flee; but the big drum kept thundering on to keep their courage up, and the little snare-drum trotted bravely along at the heels of the humming and banging as a sort of rear-guard to force into the thin ranks any cowardly or straggling notes that might fall behind.

I thought the deepest misery of tavern life had been sounded at Walla Walla and Palouse City; but, bless you! I was inexperienced. The "gentlemanly clerk" of the Cheney hotel was a homicide not only under conviction, but actually undergoing a year's sentence, and he went up to the jail to sleep every night, carrying the key to his cell in his pocket. The crockery was the most valuable of bric-a-brac, if cracks are a criterion. The waiters were assorted into three nationalities and two colors, to suit every taste, and were obliging enough to sit beside you at the table and entertain you with enlivening conversation if their duties were slack for a moment. The bill of fare was gorgeously adorned with Egyptian scenery composed by the job-printer out of material kindly furnished by the type-foundry, and contained line after line of French dishes that complimented the crudition of the cooly cook far more than his ability when they presented themselves.

"Beef *a la mode!*" one traveller was heard to exclaim. "I suppose that means 'after a fashion,' "

A very bad fashion.



A GRAIN ELEVATOR, CHENEY, WASH. TER.

When I wanted to go to bed I was conducted to a house some distance away, and shown to a little doorless cell upstairs, built of new lumber, out of which the resin was exuding in big drops and trickling streams. The total furniture consisted of three nails, a tin candlestick, and a rough bedstead on which was laid an inch or so of hay in a sack, and two army blankets. A series of these balsamic cells were occupied at a dollar a night each by men very glad to get any place to lie down.

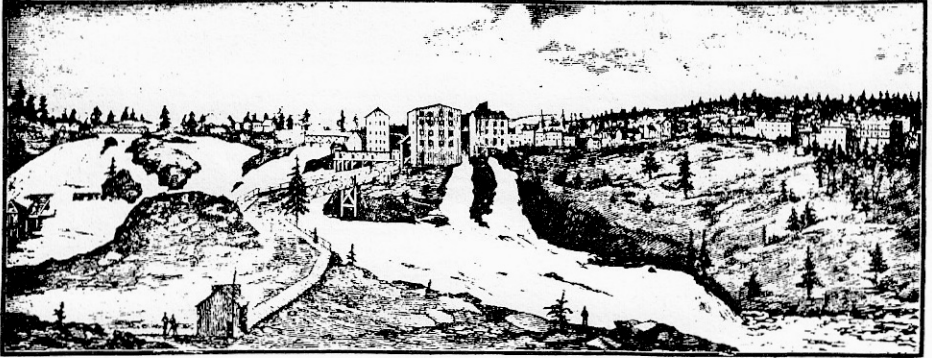
“Weariness

Can snore upon the flint, when resty sloth

Finds the down pillow hard.”

A pair of stentor-voiced minstrels going through a long repertory for the benefit of a contiguous beer saloon, in which “Rock of Ages” came next to “Patrick, mind the Baby,” and “Annie Laurie” found herself in close pursuit of “Biddy McGee,” made no hurtful impression upon my drowsy ears. It did wake me up, however, when at midnight one lodger who had left his bed for five minutes in search of a drink—of water, he said, but that is doubtful—came back to find a stranger between his warm blankets. Naturally a row ensued, but nobody was killed; and presently the sunshine of another day came streaming through the horizontal cracks in the wall and the vertical cracks in the partition, dividing the gloom of my cell into hundreds of cubes of gleaming dust-motes.

Cheney possesses several hundred people, all of whom are enterprising and busy. Two years ago there was not a vestige of a town. Now it is the chief place for business



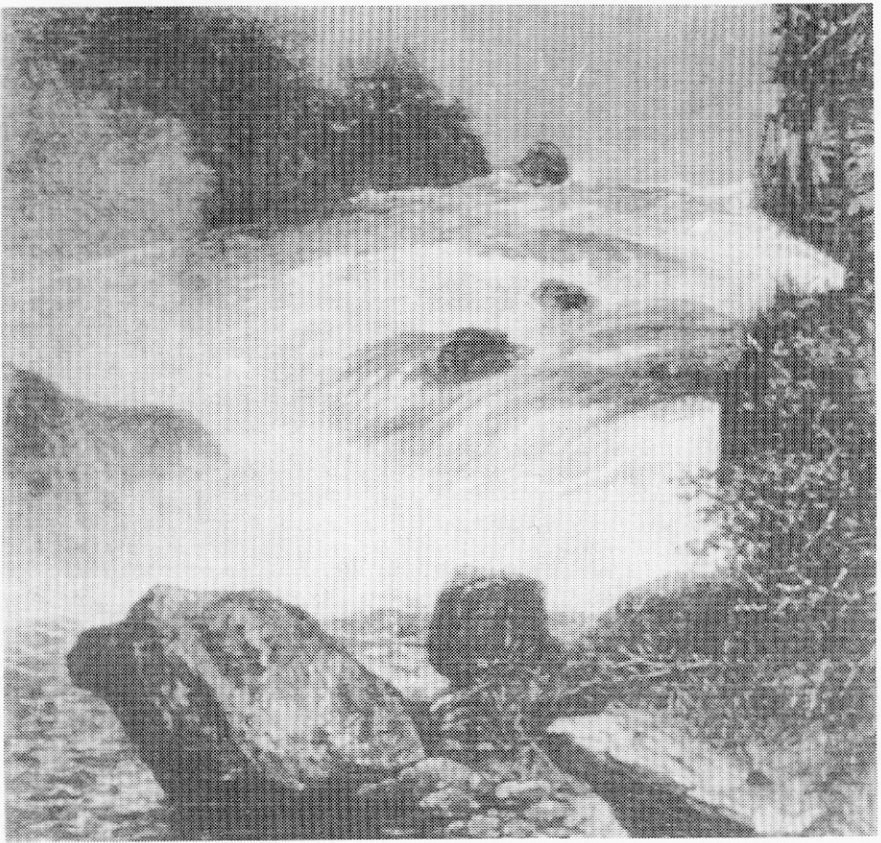
THE WATER POWER OF SPOKANE FALLS, WASH. TER.

“in the upper country,” except Spokane Falls; is building brick stores, churches, a big new hotel, has a large academy, and is selling town lots at big prices. That it will have long and steady life, I have no doubt; whether its ambition of becoming the metropolis of the region is to be realized, remains to be seen. As yet it is new and rough to the last degree.

At Spokane Falls is Liberty Hall.

“That is your room,” said our host, opening a door into a cool, prettily furnished chamber, domestic enough either to make us homesick or cure us of it, as the effect happened to be—“That is your room; make the most of it. We don’t get up till we get ready, but there is a good restaurant, where you can get your breakfast. For luncheon you will always find trifles in the cupboard”—and with that he led to the darkened dinning-room “and beer or claret in this refrigerator. Help yourself. We dine at five o’clock, but you needn’t worry about any spike-tailed coat or clerical tie.”

So the jolly days went by in the luxurious idleness of rest, and in picking up loose ends of work that had trailed behind our rapid transit—went by in strong hot blaze at noonday, and in breezy coolness after sunset. Then in the comfort of hammocks and easy-chairs, under the influence of good tobacco and merry company, we heard much about the attractions of Spokane Falls, and believed it all, because we wished to. We learned what a bright little town was growing up there, and that a very excellent class



of people were choosing it for their home; how it had none of the signs of the rough, temporary "camp," but was destined to grow solidly and prettily into the most important and most desirable town in the whole region. Why this confidence? was the question asked and discussed. Because of the vast fertile plains north and south of it, which are being settled with great rapidity, and will send it a large portion of their trade; because of the loveliness of its site; because of its healthfulness and comfortable climate, especially in winter; because its interests are already in the hands of enterprising and intelligent people; but chiefly on account of the inducements which it offers to manufacturers.

The Spokane River at the falls comes sweeping down, a clear, full-bodied, powerful stream more than a hundred feet wide, and it goes crashing in a short series of magnificent cascades down three ledges, measuring together 150 feet. Few cataracts in the wide world are more splendid in their snowy, tumultuous beauty than this—a glory no device of men can ever destroy, as has been done at St. Anthony. But the grand picture of the falls is not the claim they make upon us for prophecy; it is the power in this swift and easily harnessed water to turn mill-wheels. At Spokane Falls will rise the manufacturing town that the wide farming population of the plateaus of the Columbia and the Spokane must soon make necessary, and about it will cluster the most solidly constituted and agreeable society to be found "east of the mountains."

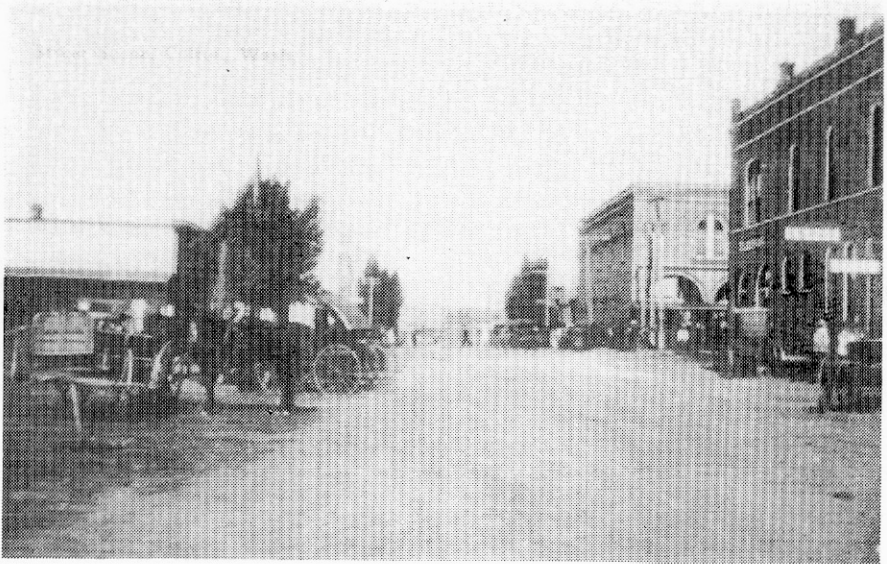
United We Stand

by
Kimberley Bradford

There has been considerable research done on the effects of the Great Depression of the 1920s and 30s on American society. Most of this research deals, however, with the federal legislation enacted during the Roosevelt Era, the effects of the Depression on urban industrial sectors of society, and the agricultural and economic problems experienced by farms of the Midwest. While all these areas were severely affected by the Depression, they do not reflect the totality of the Great Depression experienced in eastern Washington. Was the Depression a purely negative experience? Was it always a force to cause disharmony. In looking at the disruption in large cities and the mass evacuation of midwestern farm land, one would be inclined to view it this way. Perhaps in concentrating attention on the most disruptive elements, historians may have overlooked the fact that not all sectors of society reacted in the same way to the Depression. It seems likely that people in smaller, rural communities may have experienced a different facet of the Depression than those living in more densely populated areas. This article examines rural Colton, located in Whitman County, to determine how this community shaped, and was shaped by, the Depression years.

When thinking about rural America, it is tempting to imagine a pre industrial era when most Americans depended on farms as their means of subsistence. With the predominance of urban and suburban culture in the twentieth century it is easy to forget that today's rural population in the United States continues to extend a strong influence over all segments of our society. Although rural living is on the decline, in 1970 "its total population still exceeded the combined population of America's 100 largest cities. Rural America is large enough to be classified as the world's ninth largest country. (Only China, India, U.S.S.R., Japan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Brazil have total populations that exceed the rural populations of the U.S.)."¹

Ironically, the agricultural revolution during the late 1800's provided a foundation for the growth of urban and suburban populations. With new technological advances in farming, the nation no longer depended upon the majority of its population to fulfill



Colton Business District.

—Wilson photographs, Washington State University Libraries

its food production needs. The number of farm laborers dropped as production increased. “In 1920, the farm income represented about 15% of the national total. By 1929, this proportion had fallen to only about 9%.”² Accompanying this decline, several million farmers were forced to migrate to cities; of those who stayed, many lost ownership of their land or became tenant farmers.

Focusing in on Washington State’s rural life during the Depression of 1929, we see an impact less severe than that in the midwestern plains where dust storms destroyed productivity, forcing many farmers to leave for want of a crop. In Washington State, farm production was at a peak in 1932. However, in 1933 it fell below its 1929 level. From 1929 to 1933 the farm cash income decreased by 88,600,000 dollars.³

In spite of this decline in production, rural life in Washington State during the Depression had its advantages over urban life. In 1933, the combined urban/rural labor force was 681,000 workers. Of these, 178,700 were unemployed and of these unemployed, about two-thirds lived in urban areas. Between 1930 and 1935, the state’s farm population increased by an estimated 47,818 persons.⁴ A possible explanation for these figures is that the rural man who was unemployed could at least raise some food for his family’s needs while the city man was dependent on relief programs. The farmer who controlled the means of his existence in some respects had it easier than the city worker who did not.

During the Great Depression Washington’s population voted in a Democratic majority in both houses and elected a Democratic governor, Clarence D. Martin. In his inaugural address the governor hinted that one of the values of rural life should be revised—“We must first of all revise the philosophy which had guided our previous government, that of ‘rugged individualism’ which preached ‘survival of the strongest’.”⁵ “The independence of the American farmer had long been proverbial,

and joining the ranks of the unemployed seeking private/public relief was hard.”⁶ Relief agencies were less effective in the rural areas than in the cities where most such programs were executed. However, farmers were aided directly in major New Deal domestic legislation. The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) of 1933 and 1938 encouraged agricultural stability by attempting to control agricultural production, and later by setting up marketing quotas, soil conservation payments, export subsidies and crop loans. This type of indirect relief although not immediate did not affront personal pride as did unemployment and handouts.⁷ In January of 1933 Spokane’s *Spokesman Review* offered to run free want ads. On the first day one and one-half columns of the paper were utilized for this purpose. The unwillingness to accept charity can be seen in such ads as this one, “Engineer and machinist wants work for food and shelter . . .”⁸

Turning to south eastern Washington, a predominant rural area in Washington State, a personal account of the Depression as told by Kay Turner suggests that although difficult, the Depression in rural eastern Washington was not as severe as elsewhere in the state and nation. Mrs. Turner has lived in Whitman County all her life. When the Depression hit, she said that she had to sell what few belongings her family had to cover their small debt. She felt that,

“The ones who were in greater debt were the more fortunate ones. The bank couldn’t get fifty cents on the dollar, so it was seen they stayed on the ranch . . . The ones who just started out and were not very much in debt lost out, because if they had anyways near enough to pay out, that was it. So we sold our lease, cattle and horses, everything we had.”

Yet Mrs. Turner never felt frightened. “I’m sure it must have been terrible in cities and towns . . . Everything, while it was cheap, required money, if you were in towns to live.” She felt country people had it the best. There was plenty to eat in Whitman County; no poor crops. There were gardens, and friends and family support. “Actually, it wasn’t a fun time, yet in ways it was, because it brought people together and kept families together.” She said people learned to work together, to do without or to improvise; people were doctored at home, clothes were made out of used material, holes were cut into the toes of shoes, and social gatherings were always buffet style, with local free talent. The only resentment Mrs. Turner experienced was that the Depression did not give her a chance to get ahead.⁹

Kay Turner’s description of “community” is an important key to understanding the reaction of south eastern Washington rural communities to the Great Depression. In order to understand the character of these communities, it is helpful to become acquainted with the hardy breed who first turned the bunchgrass hills into fields of grain. What type of people did south eastern Washington’s rolling hill country draw to itself, and what was the nature of the communities these pioneers built? To answer some of these questions, we can study the history of Colton, a rural town in Whitman County.

Looking back 116 years, to 1867, we see the first settlers coming to the Colton area in a wagon train of eighteen German Catholic families led by Captain Davey of the United States Army. Destined for the Oregon country, part of the immigrant group decided to plant their roots in the Palouse rather than continue with the rest of the train to Oregon.¹⁰

In 1878, eleven years after this early settlement, Thomas Montgomery received from the United States government a large parcel of land in the vicinity of the German settlement. On February 4, 1878, the Montgomery farm was surveyed and divided in-

to lots; a town was born. It was called Uniontown because it was located in the Union Flat and around the Union Flat Creek.¹¹

Evidently Uniontown did not live up to its harmonious-sounding name. Within a year of its founding, three prominent community members—Ray Woodworth, L. J. Wolford, and Dr. Cole—had a meeting in which two of them proposed starting another town. Ray Woodworth objected at first, but all of the men were displeased with the present town site and the way in which the town was being run. It was finally proposed that a new town be established on a 480-acre far owned by Gregor Koshier. Shortly the town was surveyed and plotted. The blacksmith shop and hotel were moved on logs from Uniontown to Colton and a general store was built. The town was named by taking the first three letters of Dr. Cole's last name and the last three letters of L. J. Wolford's eldest son, Clinton.¹²

Colton is located on higher ground than Uniontown and is drained by the Union Flat Creek. It covers parts of Section 34 and 35 in Township 13, north of Range 45 East of the Willamette Meridian. The new community came into its own on the 19th of March, 1888, when the tracks of the Spokane and Palouse railroad were completed to Colton.¹³

There were two hundred thousand bushels of grain waiting to be shipped out, and soon the trains were bringing in a great many families . . . Supplies of machinery, lumber, cordwood and all other sorts of merchandise were arriving daily, while the outgoing trains were taking shipments of cattle, hogs, cream, eggs, besides grain. All were finding a way to the market.¹⁴

Like citizens in most young communities, people living in Colton were concerned with growth. The T. L. Flower Real Estate & Loan Broker Company, in its 1893 pamphlet entitled "Whitman County, Washington . . . Greatest Grain Producing County in the World and Its Principal Towns" described Colton as "home" to people who were,

. . . searching for a town where money judiciously invested will bring rich reward or where you can embark on any legitimate business and by push and energy make a success in life . . . Anything that can be found in a city is found in Colton, for this little town is not built upon the usual frontier plan, but is quite metropolitan. Colton is the only town in the United States that has doubled its population in 1892.

The pamphlet went on to describe the reasons for this growth, indicating Colton's fine social structure, mild winters, stability as exemplified in its fine permanent homes, and its proximity to the proposed route of the Great Northern Railway.¹⁵

Although the development of Colton may not have been as glorious as the picture painted by the T. L. Flower Real Estate and Loan Broker Company, the town did grow and become established as an urban center. By 1921, eight years before the Great Depression, a significant community had been formed. According to the *Colton Directory*, the town's business included a chop mill, a steam flour mill, a blacksmith shop, and garage, a general mercantile store and a town bank. In the way of education, the town provided a graded public school and a private Catholic academy for the predominantly Catholic population. By way of culture, the town had its own theatre, convent, Methodist, Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches, a public hall and a weekly newspaper call the *Newsletter*. For convenience, and as a step toward modernization, there was a public water works system, a telegraph express, daily mail, and of course, the railroad. In the 31 years since the completion of the railroad in 1889, the Colton population had grown from about 250 people to 382.¹⁶

Business is an important aspect of any town, providing for the growth and needs of the community, it was also the case in Colton. During the Depression, for example, business in Colton survived the hard years through community effort and participation. By December 1934, after the worst two years of the Depression, only the meat market had been forced to close its doors on February 9, 1933. The owner of this business, M. W. Cole, inserted an ad in the newspaper which read, "I hope if I ever start in business again, I will still have my old customers, as I will treat them all alike as in the past."¹⁷

As revealed in the December 6, 1934 Colton *Newsletter*, after the worst of the Depression, the major Colton firms were still advertising—the Security Bank, Colton Grocery, Schmicks' Cigar Store, Marine Oasis, Haupt Supply Company, Palace Barber Shop, Washington Water Power Co., The Highway Garage and Hardware, Colton's Grain and Warehouse Co., The Farmers Automobile Inter-Insurance Exchange, and the *Newsletter* itself. It would be fair to say that the business survived the Depression and that community spirit was strengthened in the Depression years.

A major difference between Colton and other, more urban populations lies in the homogenous structure of the small town's community life. A majority of Colton's population in the 1930's was Catholic. They were wheat farmers. They had the same neighbors all of their lives, they participated in the same social events, their money was in the same bank, their children were all close friends, they all worried about the same weather, and read the same newspaper. Each person in such a community could empathize with a neighbors' concerns as if they were his or her own. What was relevant to one was relevant to all. In November of 1929, following the great Stock Market Crash, the Security State Bank ran an ad in the Colton *Newsletter* emphasizing the importance of community

In a large group of people a community is practically as necessary as the family. Man strives to work for the welfare of his family. If he would serve his family best, he must also work for the welfare of his community. The people living in and around Colton make a splendid community. Let us always keep in mind, as we work day by day, that we are part of this community and that as long as we expect to derive benefits from this community we must do our share for the welfare of the Colton community.

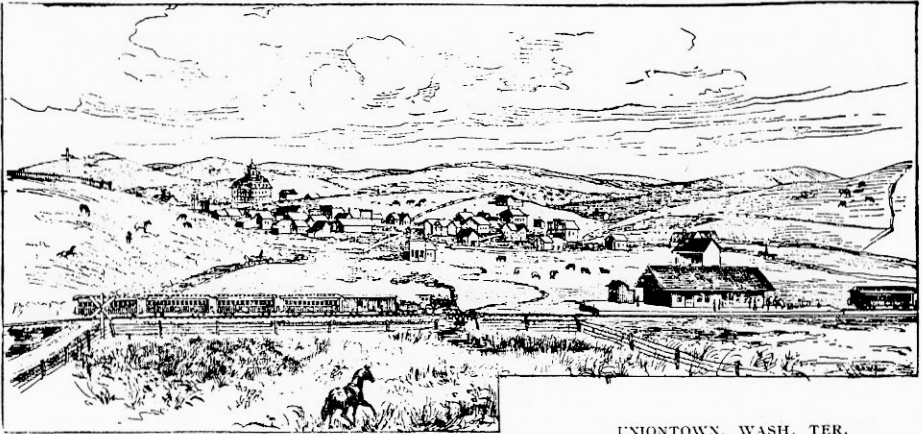
Apparently, Colton did not feel the brunt of the Depression until about 1932. The Colton *Newsletter* did not even mention the Stock Market Crash, but remained covertly "optimistic" throughout the year 1930. As a matter of fact, "optimistic" seemed to have been a popular headline word. On January 20, 1930 a *Newsletter* article entitled "State Chamber is Optimistic" stated that,

. . . the year 1930 will be a good year in the State of Washington, with greater activity in almost every line of construction and industry than in 1929 . . . Mr. Haines said the statement made by leading business men at the county and the Washington meeting showed that conditions are sound; there will be no curtailment in employment; and prices are likely to remain stable.

A month later, on February 20, 1930, another *Newsletter* article stated,

An optimistic outlook for the Inland Empire was reflected at the merchandising conference of thirty-five district agents of Washington Water Power Company held in Spokane last week . . . The outlook is very promising and we expect a considerable increase in merchandise volume over the previous twelve months.

The first article to deal with Colton's major Depression concern—grain prices—was printed in the May 8, 1930 Colton *Newsletter* under the heading "Wheat Growers Up in Arms." The article was a reprint of a telegram sent by the Pullman Grain



UNIONTOWN, WASH. TER.

Growers, Inc. to Senators W. L. Jones, G. C. Pill, Wie Buran, Charles McNary, and Thomas A. Walsh; to Alexander Legge, Chairman of the Federal Farm Board; and to Secretary of Agriculture Hyde. The telegram/article dealt with two issues. The first charge was discrimination and the second, deprivation of price.

Under the charge of discrimination, two questions were asked. First, why was there so much loan delay in the Pacific Northwest? Second, why were the farmers told they could receive loans on the 1929 crop basis of \$1.13 terminal until June 30, and why was the date changed to April 30?

Dealing with the deprivation of price, the telegram asserted that farmers had held their grain under the assurance of a loan. Country bankers carried the farmer under the same assurance. Much of this grain could have been marketed March 1st at higher values than May 1st. "The action of the farm board in curtailing loans will result in dumping millions of bushels of wheat on the market . . . Why has not sufficient money been available to take care of loans 100%? As it is, we are only receiving 25% of the loans asked for."

The effect of lower market prices in Colton can be seen from another *Newsletter* article under the heading "Town Talk." This article said that "an occasional car of grain is loaded and shipped but the movement is slow and guarded as the price is not equal to the cost."¹⁸ By August 13, 1931 the Colton paper reported that "There is very little selling of new crop wheat throughout the interior, the tendency being to hold for a turn in the market."¹⁹

Wheat market prices tell the story. In Portland on January 26, 1930, Big Bend bluestem was at \$1.39; soft white and Western white \$1.29; hard winter, northern spr-

ing and Western red \$1.29. The Seattle outlet was similar, with prices about two cents lower.²⁰ By September 22, 1932, Big Bend bluestem and hard wheat were at 56¢; soft white and Western white were at 48½¢; hard winter, Northern spring and western red at 47¢. Seattle prices were again similar, only Big Bend bluestem registered at 3¢ more.²¹

The fall in wheat prices was related more to the international than to the national economic upheaval. It was the world-wide depression which affected Pacific Northwest wheat growers most acutely. Most of the large importing countries adopted measures restricting the importation of foreign wheat in order to raise the price of their home-grown wheat above the world market level. With virtually no market, wheat prices dropped dramatically.

In 1938, the *Hill Top News*, the local high school newspaper, ran an article entitled "History of Colton." In this article it was briefly mentioned that "during the period of 1932 and 1934 there was a Depression in this country which caused a lack of business and industry."²² From Colton's perspective this statement has validity. A sharp fall in wheat prices occurred in 1932. By October 1932 farm products had dropped 56% from the 1929 purchasing power of 89%. This is a reduction of 39% in the buying power of the farm dollar.²³ Under the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) initiated in Colton in September 1933, a contract was presented that carried a guarantee of parity prices for wheat in 1933, 1934, and 1935 in return for acreage reduction in 1934 and 1935.²⁴ In July of 1933 an all-day meeting was held in Colton to discuss the New Agricultural Adjustment Act. That September the Colton paper reported that "nearly every farmer filled out an application in line with the president's move to cut down their wheat acreage."²⁵ By 1934 government intervention through the AAA was helping to alleviate the worst of financial burdens. On November 1, 1934 the Colton *Newsletter* stated that farmers were to receive their allotment checks soon, meaning "the release of about one million five hundred thousand dollars in wheat benefit payments, at one time, to the farmers of Whitman County."²⁶

Similar programs, such as the Hog Control Program, where the federal government paid a premium for hogs, were implemented throughout Whitman County. By 1934, limited production and government compensation seemed to have eased the market crisis. An examination of the holdings of Colton's bank, the Security State Bank, would seem to confirm this assessment. On January 19, 1929, the bank's resources stood at \$381,558.81.²⁷ By December 30, 1933 its resources had dipped to \$218,927.27.²⁸ However, by the 12th of July, 1934 they had rebounded to \$250,898.34²⁹, showing upward financial movement in the community.

The only direct welfare movement in Colton began in February 1933, as a result of the McDonald Bill, legislation providing for the establishment of the State Emergency Relief Commission. As directed by the bill, the state was divided into 17 districts, Colton being in District No. 9. Men were then employed to do community benefit projects that did not displace any other labor and could not be provided for in municipal or county budgets. It is interesting to note that the previous owner of the meat market, M. W. Cole, was named manager of the Colton district.³⁰

Because most of its members were employed on the land, Colton did not have the intensity of labor problems found in the city. This, however, did not stifle the spirit



Colton, Panorama, about 1912.

—Wilson photographs, Washington State University Libraries

and pride the community exhibited in its participation of Roosevelt's New Deal Program. Of all the communities supporting Roosevelt, few could declare the unanimity found in Colton. Of the 118 city votes cast in the 1932 elections, 98 were for Roosevelt. In the country the situation was much the same, with 81 of 95 votes cast going to Roosevelt. The Democratic candidate for governor, Martin, received the same enthusiastic support, taking 102 city votes and 85 of the country. The same trend of voting followed for all other Democratic offices, including those of Senator Bone and Congressman Hill.

Support for the Democrats was followed by action. Not only did the community draw from direct relief programs such as the AAA and the McDonald Bill, but Colton also directed her efforts toward programs designed more in the "home remedy" style. Practically every business displayed the blue eagle, emblem of the National Recovery Act (NRA). During the first week of September 1933 the town participated in an NRA consumer drive with the goal of placing a "blue eagle" in every window by August 31. On September 7 the Colton *Newsletter* ran an article explaining the responsibilities of the community under the NRA program. Basically it was a simple procedure. Employers were to shorten labor hours so as to employ more people and consumers were to buy only from those businesses which displayed the NRA blue eagle. The NRA might have been seen less effective in large, industrialized areas where many workers are employed. Certainly it would not have the impact of the AAA. However, in a rural town like Colton, the psychological benefits of action and participation were enough to kindle community spirit.

Speaking of kindled spirits, at least one aspect of the Depression did have a "dampening" effect in Colton. In the dry month of August, 1933, the community voted 156 to 12 to go wet, that is, allow the sale of alcoholic beverages. Although the overall vote of Whitman County was "dry," Washington as a whole became the 24th

state to ratify the repeal of Prohibition outlined in the 15th Amendment. It is likely that Colton was always a little damp despite the 15th Amendment. Helen Meyers, a lifetime resident, reminisces,

How well I can remember the bootlegger era—home brew, hidden stills to make whiskey, and what not . . . All at once a new tonic, called 'Digesto' was appearing on the druggist's shelves. It was getting so popular with the young people (it had a slight taste of beer). It became so much in demand that the federal officers became suspicious. When they found out it contained too much alcohol then was permitted [sic], it soon disappeared off the shelves.³¹

In the decade before and during the Depression, Colton went through a period of considerable change. This was the "roaring twenties." Hair styles changed from long and wrapped up to loose or bobbed. Curly permanents were definitely in vogue. Hemlines of dresses went up—in some cases to several inches above the knees. The Colton *Newsletter* kept the community up on the latest fashion. A half-page was often dedicated to who was wearing what in New York, or whether hats were to be in style in the spring. The paper also featured short stories of romance or mystery similar to those found in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

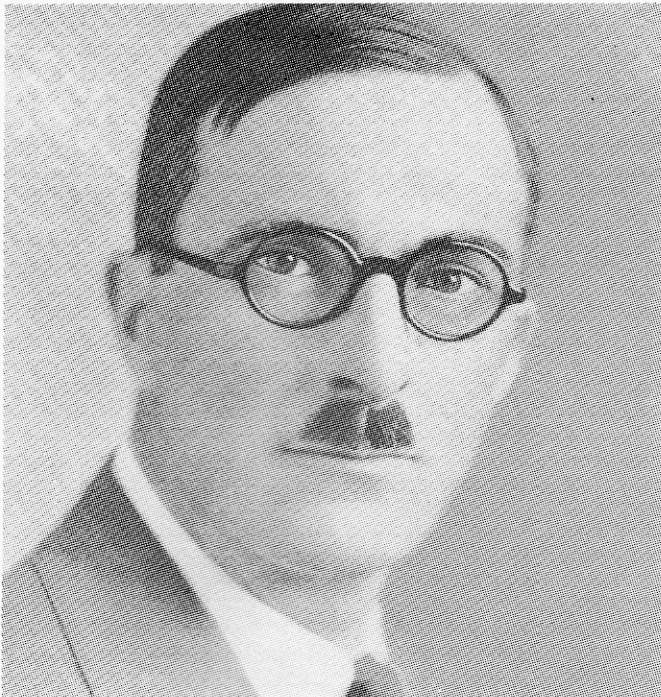


World events also imposed themselves on the community. No longer was the paper strictly a mirror reflecting events in Colton. Rather, it became a window, opening upon the rest of the world. The evolution of the town newspaper corresponded to Colton's expanding knowledge of the world outside due to breakthroughs in communications. In fact, the structure of the town also changed. The old hitching posts disappeared from the main street. Pavement was laid over dust and dirt. Sidewalks were installed and all the roads were rocked. By 1930, the automobile had almost completely replaced the horse as the mode of transportation.

For a rural community, Colton probably felt itself to be quite modern. Such assessments are of course, in the eyes of the beholder. Helen McGreevy, a resident of Colton, in an interview with Margot Knight, told of a humorous incident between herself and an Eastern visitor. Helen was sent to the train to meet a young woman who was to visit her sister, a student at the Catholic academy.

"When the train came in I was there, and here this young woman, who was two or three years older than I was, stepped off the train and stood there looking rather perplexed. I walked up to her and said, "Are you Anna Burns?" "Yes," she said, "where's the cabbie? Where's the cabbie?" I said, "What did you say?" "Where's the cabbie?" Well, I really didn't know what she was talking about, but I answered, "Well, we don't have any." "Well, how do we get to the school?" I said, "We walk." "Walk!" she said. I said, "Yes, we walk."

She looked so perplexed and I was wondering what in the world was wrong with her. And then I asked her if she didn't have a suitcase, and she said, "Yes, but do I have to carry it?" I said "yes" and could tell by her face that she couldn't believe what she was seeing or hearing; and I couldn't understand what in the world was the trouble with her, because when we came on the train we carried our suitcases and walked. I finally discovered what she meant by "cabbie." She was looking for the taxi cab . . . She didn't stay very long . . . Every once in a while, you'd see her and she'd always end whatever you were saying with "If I don't go back to New York I'll eat my shirt." We thought that was so funny. It got to be a word for all of us when anything went wrong. Of course we had no idea what New York was like, and she had had no idea what Colton was like."



—Washington State University Libraries

Clarence D. Martin of Cheney, elected Governor of Washington in 1932 as a fight-the-depression candidate. Residents of Colton gave Martin a large majority of their votes.

Perhaps one of the advantages to living in a small rural community such as Colton during the Depression was that the change in life style was dramatic and sudden. Community entertainment rarely depended on any unobtainable sum of money. The Catholic church, high school and local talent groups provided for most of the formal entertainment. School plays were a favorite in the winter months and in the summer the people enjoyed the open air pavillion dances held weekly. The price of merchandise and foodstuffs was not as important for those in Colton as, say, those in Spokane, since, as was mentioned, most food was grown at home. Clothes were often hand-sewn, people were well enough acquainted with their neighbors to exchange old outgrown clothes, or to borrow an item rather than to buy it. Undoubtedly the feeling of desperation and alienation that existed in larger cities did not exist in Colton. The owner of the Colton flour mill, Mr. Hamp, indicated that there was a feeling of trust within the community. During the Depression, the mill was never locked up and nothing was lost except a half sack of feed.

Three personal interviews with residents of the Colton area—Jean Marine, Martha Kuder, and Helen McGreevy—all indicated that although the community was forced to tighten its belt, severe deprivation was not a problem. Martha recalls that, “It was a pretty bad time, but no one was really down and out altogether . . . Wheat sold for only 25¢ a bushel.” Even with this low income for farmers, she could not recall knowing personally any farmer who was forced to sell out. “They all managed somehow.” Helen, who lived with her husband and family on a farm a short distance from Colton during the Depression, could not sell her farm supplies; there was not enough cash coming in. “The AAA really helped; if it wasn’t for that we wouldn’t have sold any

wheat at all. We were all in support of Roosevelt.” Jean lived within the city limits during the Depression. Her husband was the postmaster and together they owned the Marine Oasis Variety Store. She recalls once, around Christmas time, a woman came in and wanted to buy a knife for a Christmas present. It was 75¢ and the woman said, “I guess he’ll have to do without.” “Everybody did without,” Jean remembers. “We didn’t have it very good. Eighty dollars was a postman’s pay. With the payment on the house we really ran short. We had some business, but not as much as before. Beer took away the ice cream sales.” However, Jean believes that the experience was “nothing like it was in the cities,” and that “it didn’t affect people that weren’t used to a lot, like it would now.” Helen can remember trading clothes with the neighbors, or for a more colorful improvisation, taking the dyed flour sacks from the mill and creating shirts, skirts, and blouses. “Boy, I still wish we had some of those colored flour sacks around today.”



Since Colton was basically a farming community, not centered upon ventures in commercial enterprise, business evolved more as a service to the community. According to Jean, business slowed a great deal, but survived. Most of the community members were farmers but if not they were businessmen. Jean believes that church affairs played the dominant role in the community. Recently, converted to the Catholic faith at age 60, she remembers that “not being a Catholic but living in a Catholic community, you were sort of on the outside.” Helen, recalling a few years earlier, about 1914, said that “it used to be the Catholics were on one side of town and the protestants on the other.” When she was a student at the academy she and a group of her Catholic friends encountered a humorous situation. A bunch of protestant kids passing them began to yell, “Cat Lickers, Cat Lickers.” Her sharp-witted friend turned around with the immediate reply, “Protestant Pups.” Undoubtedly the Catholic church and schools were a central aspect of community life for its members, but as a whole, the religious split seems to have acted as a divisive force. Perhaps a more representative organization, and one that was fully participated in, was the local Grange. Helen recalls that, “the Grange was very important in the way it connected the community.” The Grange was the central meeting place in which the surrounding community would come together to socialize and discuss political and economic concerns. The Grange meetings were always well attended. Other more purely social functions were also a part of the depression years. Of course there were the dances often played for by the Mann Brothers from Lewiston; there were the school plays, card parties, and high school football and basketball games. One of the biggest events of the years, in Helen’s recollection, was the annual Fourth-of-July picnic. “The whole area would get together. There was a veteran’s band, a big parade, kids on their horses, kids dressed up like clowns and things, fun to watch.” She mentioned the drummer boys and fiery stump speeches. “There was a big baseball game and everyone brought a picnic dinner. It was sort of a community happening.”

Jean, remembering prohibition, did not think that it had been carried out very strictly in the Colton area. “Most people made their own home-made beer.” It seemed that the illegal aspect of the tonic added spark to its possession. Beer did not meet the fate of ‘Digesto,’ there were always back-door markets. With a laugh, Martha said that she could “remember when we used to go to the dances and hide the bottle in the bushes and then we’d sneak away from the dance.” She particularly remembered a col-



—Wilson Photographs, Washington State University Libraries

Colton, Group of School Children, 1899.

orful character, Harry Cook. “He lived in an old shack, and we kids used to sneak up there to listen to his record player. He used to sell this moonshine. The police came, but they never did find the bottles. He had them hidden. There were some good times up there.”

In retrospect, it seems that social and cultural change had a more devastating effect on Colton than did the Depression. According to Jean, Colton used to “have everything that you could want. People didn’t go outside . . . The car is what did the damage.” It is true that commercial business in Colton is on a decline. Only Kamer’s Fountain (formerly the Marine Oasis), the bank, and two taverns are left to represent the enterprising aspect of the community. Shopping centers in neighboring towns make successful small private business in Colton next to impossible. The convenience of a wide selection at lower prices in Lewiston and Moscow makes future business growth seem unlikely. Those Colton residents employed outside agriculture work outside the community at Washington State University, or the Lewiston mill. Jean pointed out the window to her neighbors’ homes and she said, “A lot of the residents here are retired farmers. As they retire, their sons and grandsons take over. This is a fairly wealthy community.”

Driving through Colton and looking at the boarded-up windows and doors along the main business street, an outsider might wonder, what does hold this community together? Jean, in predicting the future of her town, thinks that “For some time the church will keep the people close.” Today in Colton, the Catholic church is indeed one of the most active community organizations. The closest protestant church is in Uniontown, approximately three miles away. Both Jean and Helen said that the town is becoming more solidly Catholic than in its early days. A possible explanation for this may be that the people who live in Colton now choose it for retirement or they choose

to live in Colton and commute to work. It is possible these people choose Colton because of its compatibility with their religious beliefs and preferences. There are 72 children enrolled in the Catholic Guardian Angel school. The Catholic church provides a variety of functions, such as Daughters of the American Revolution, Knights of Columbus, and Saint Galls Altar Society, all of which contribute to binding the community together.

Martha says that the church is important to the community but at present, she said, "I think the high school holds it together. I'm sure of it." Not only was the high school Martha's favorite aspect of the community, but she also feels that it is their most outstanding achievement. In 1982 the school was rated Number One in Washington State for Single-A schools and subsequently the football team took the community to Seattle's Kingdome for the state championship—which they won for the fourth time! The high school enrolls 102 students, while the public grade school enrolls 90. A considerable number of these students live in the outlying area on farms. Without the schools and church, it seems probable that the community would lose a large portion of its population. These two organizations seem to be the foundation of the community today. The Grange is still an important factor, but it does not seem to generate the enthusiasm and pride that is represented in the schools and church.

In many ways it is intriguing and pleasing to explore a community that is built upon unity and friendship rather than the cash nexus. Thinking back through her years of living in Colton, Jean smiled and said she felt the community is as close as it ever was. This closeness is observable in all sections of Colton's society. Yet, there seems to be a special closeness among the old-timers, those whose roots go back several generations. Folks who have resided in Colton for a mere half-century are "good friends," not yet "family."



NOTES

¹Lewis R. Tamblin, *Inequality: A Portrait of Rural America* (Washington, D.C.: Rural Education Association, 1973), p. 1.

²*Ibid.*,

³Henry Charles Randolph, "Washington State—Economic Conditions," M.A. Thesis, Washington State University, 1970. p. 7.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷Weinstein Wilson, *Freedom and Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1978)

⁸*The Spokane Spokesman Review*, January 20, 1933.

⁹Kay Turner, "Flavor of Depression in Whitman County; Personal Life Story," *Bunchgrass Historian*, (6/2 Summer 1978): 9-17.

¹⁰Colton Guardian Angel School, Class of 1976, *Colton-Uniontown—What Makes These Towns Tick?* (Colton: Timothy Printers, 1976) p. 5.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³Clarence L. Gowell, "Colton," *Colton Eagle*, April 19, 1888.

¹⁴Helen Meyers, *Colton "My Home Town,"* (April 1974).

¹⁵J.L. Flower Real Estate and Loan Broker. *Whitman County, Washington's Greatest Grain Producing County and Its Principle Towns* (Rosalia, Washington, 1893).

¹⁶*Whitman-Garfield Counties Directory, 1921-1922* (Seattle 1921).

¹⁷*Colton Newsletter*, December 1934.

- ¹⁸*Ibid.*, April 30, 1931.
¹⁹*Ibid.*, August 13, 1931.
²⁰*Ibid.*, January 16, 1930.
²¹*Ibid.*, September 22, 1932.
²²Colton High School, *The Hill Top News*, March 25, 1938.
²³Colton *Newsletter*, October 1932.
²⁴*Ibid.*, November 1, 1934.
²⁵*Ibid.*, September 28, 1933.
²⁶*Ibid.*, November 1, 1934.
²⁷*Ibid.*, January 10, 1929.
²⁸*Ibid.*, December 30, 1933.
²⁹*Ibid.*, July 12, 1934.
³⁰*Ibid.*, February 1933.
³¹Helen Meyer.

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•Publications of Note•

From A to Z in Latah County, Idaho: A Place Name Dictionary

by Dr. Lalia Phipps Boone

The Idaho Place Names Project, 1983, 117 pp. \$7.95 (paperback) (ISBN: 0-9612758-0-4)

From A to Z in Latah County, Idaho, is an annotated dictionary of over 600 names of towns, schools, historic sites, post offices, and other places in Latah County. Here is found a wealth of information answering questions such as: was Moscow, Idaho really named after Moscow, Russia? Why are Princeton, Yale, and Harvard found in the northeast part of the county? Why is there a creek named Strychnine? *From A to Z in Latah County, Idaho* provides details on the where and why of these and other questions.

Dr. Boone moved to Moscow in 1966 to teach in the English Department of the University of Idaho. An avid explorer of her surroundings, she was intrigued by the rich history of the area. Dr. Boone gathered place names and their history from everywhere she visited. Before long this hobby turned serious as students and acquaintances added additional names and researchers called upon her because of her expertise. The Idaho Place Names project was started by Dr. Boone when it became apparent that the amount of information she had collected was of significant historical value. Wanting to make this data available to a wider audience, Dr. Boone began work on the *Idaho State Place Name Dictionary*. As work progressed it became apparent that there was enough information on Latah County for a separate book. Given the opportunity to focus on one area, more detailed information could be provided.

As noted in the introduction, the "place names of Latah County are more than mere identifiers. They reflect all that has happened here over a very long period of time." With indexes which reference towns, creeks and rivers, gulches, canyons, meadows, flats, hollows, historic sites, mines, post offices, promontories, recreational sites, registered farms, schools, and trail stops, this book provides a comprehensive resource for the individual interested in Latah county. It is recommended to those who wish to open a "vista to the great effort of a great many far-sighted, imaginative people from whom we have inherited this beautiful, productive, inspiring place to live."

—David L. Whelchel

Illustrations

The illustration of the Falls of the Spokane River, appearing with Ingersoll's essay on his travels in Eastern Washington (page 21), originally accompanied his essay in the 1884 *Harper's*. The drawing of the Steptoe stage station—modern Cashup—was sketched a few years earlier and published in Gilbert's *Historic Sketches* of 1881. The remainder of the line drawings in this issue of *Bunchgrass Historian* first appeared in a pamphlet distributed by the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, *The Fertile and Beautiful Palouse Country*; these seem to have been sketched in 1888.