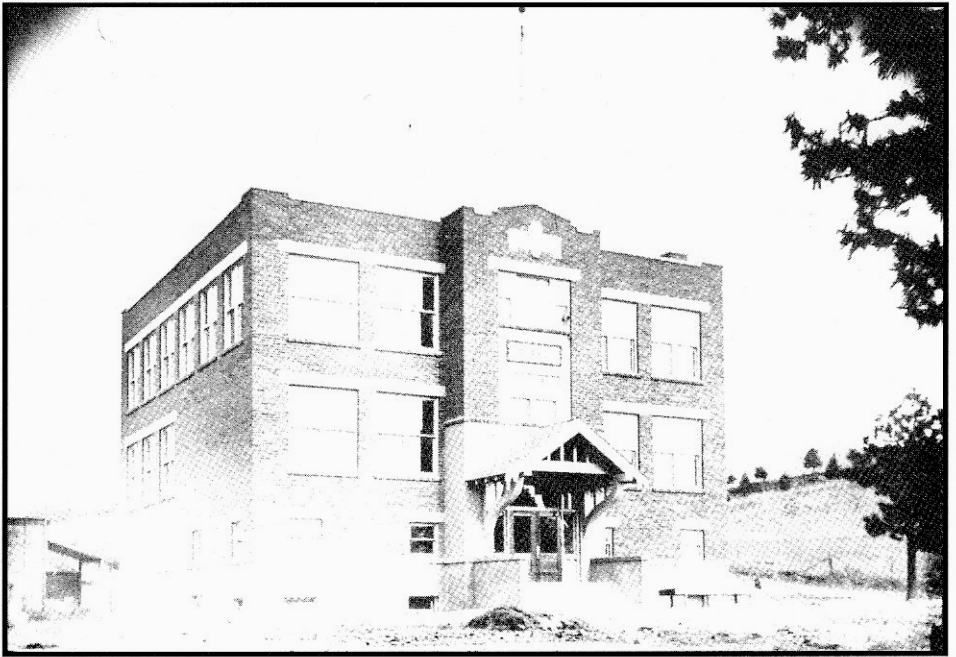


# Bunchgrass Historian

Whitman County Historical Society  
Colfax, Washington

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Number 1  
1997



- Elberton School
- John Mathews
- Steptoe, 1978
- Orville Vogel

# Whitman County Historical Society

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**Authors**

Sawang Lertrit is a grad student in Anthropology at Washington State University. His paper on the Elberton schools was one of several reports on Elberton that were prepared by a group in 1995.

Catherine Mathews Friel is a long-time Pullman resident. She gives part of her story in her article.

The article on the town of Steptoe was written about 20 years ago by Steptoe resident Lola Humphrey, who passed the copy to Edith Erickson, then of Colfax, who in turn supplied it to the Bunchgrass Historian.

The story of Orville Vogel, developer of wheat varieties and strains continues from an earlier issue. Author Clay Reis was a student at Washington State University when the article was composed.

**Cover**

Elberton School, about 1910.

## THE ELBERTON PUBLIC SCHOOL (1888-1943)

by Sawang Lertrit

### The Early Life of the School (1888-1900)

The history of Elberton public school was closely woven with the history of the town itself. Most of the sources investigated agree that the Elberton School, which was later officially named the “Whitman County School District No. 105”, was founded in 1888. But none of the sources provides specific date of establishment. Nevertheless, it can roughly be implied that the school might have been open for pupils early in February 1888 because it was reported that at the time the first school census was done in June, the school had paid out \$195 for a teacher who taught for a monthly salary of \$50 (District Clerk’s Annual Report for 1888). This means the teacher had worked for almost four months, counting back from the month of June.

Regarding the financial support, the school might receive money from one major source: Whitman County. According to the District Clerk’s Annual Report, the school was totally funded by Whitman County, Territory of Washington. Janet Small(1932) highlighted further that by 1880 schools in Whitman County were financed with public funds, there was a uniform course of study and schools were under administration of County Superintendent, who made annual visits to each school. It is possible that community members provided the school with some other support and facilities. This is supported by the study of early schools in Whitman County by Gallacci and Wilbert. Gallacci and Wilbert said that as small farming communities had developed, families began creating temporary school in their own homes or in an easily available building. For example, the school was first located in the United Brethren Church as Leid said “...there was no school house; had school in U. B. Church, 3 months in the Fall, 3 in the Spring...”

The next questions are the identification of the first teacher and their locality of origin. I investigated the documents (District Clerk’s Annual Reports; Whitman County Retired Teachers Association (1976)) and found that a Mr. Lang was the first teacher, and the Whitman County hired him at \$50 per month. Mr. Lang rode a horse from the Steptoe area to come to teach students in Elberton. He might be a well-known person in the area, and probably was desired by community members to be a teacher. I did not find any documents dealing particularly with the recruitment of teacher, but Gallacci and Wilbert state that most of early schools in Whitman County were taught by those deemed most qualified by



*City street - Elberton*

community members, and who could spare the time. School terms varied widely and had to be worked into farming schedules. For instance, James Elliot, a farmer and early teacher in the St. John area held school in his own home, usually beginning after harvest. I wonder whether Mr. Lang did any other jobs besides a teacher? If Gallacci and Wilbert are correct this indicates that local people participated in the teacher recruitment processes. I am also wondering if the school director came from local nomination or from the Territory of Washington's central educational agency? Unfortunately, I have not found any evidence to answer this question.

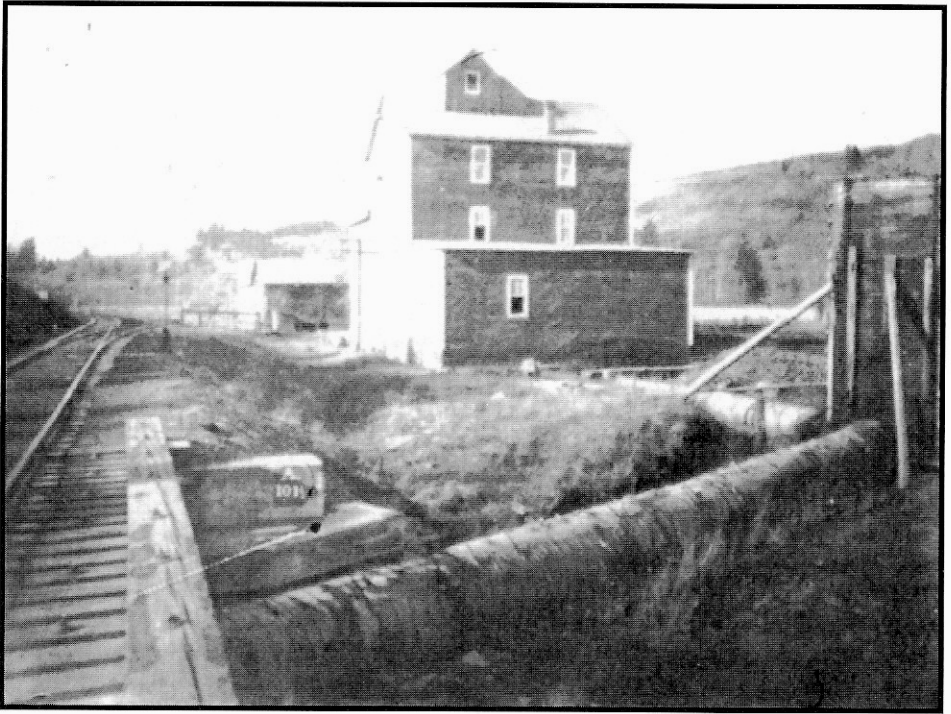
In searching for the number of students attending the school during this period, I find that the number varies from year to year. However, the contrasting number did not appear until after the two-room schoolhouse was built in 1890. From the year 1892 to 1900 the number of pupils enrolled in the school never dropped below 100, compared to the period from 1888 to 1891 in which the number of pupils never exceeded 80. It can be said that the number of students was rising in conjunction with the population immigrating into the town due to its development. In regard to the schoolhouse, many sources point out that the first schoolhouse was built in 1890, and it was said to be on an old Palouse Indian cemetery (Broderson 1989; Whitman County Retired Teachers Association 1976; Leid 1961). It was one story building, consisting of 2 rooms. As a picture of the early schoolhouse suggests, it may have been built of wood on a

concrete foundation. Later in 1893 the first brick schoolhouse was built; it had two class rooms.

Further investigation delved into the composition of school classes and the subjects taught. I found no evidence indicating whether the school had a clear distinction between elementary and high school courses. Presumably, the division of classes was roughly based on age range. According to the District Clerk's Annual Reports, course management through this period was apparently in the early stage of development. In the first three years, there were no particular courses for particular groups of pupils, but the Washington State Teachers' Manual of 1891 and 1893, the most important and only documents that teachers used as guideline for teaching and the earliest documents about the course of study I have found so far, provide detailed information for the period 1891-1893. Courses were developed for six different levels as: First Reader Course, Second Reader Course, Third Reader Course, Fourth Reader Course, Fifth Reader Course, and Advanced Course. From 1894-1901 the courses were revised and divided into nine levels comprising the First year Course to Ninth Year Course. The curriculum taught during this period includes: geography, orthography, arithmetic (primary, written, and mental), language, advanced grammar, U.S. history, physiology, and hygiene. Each subject was designed for pupils of different levels (see for more detail The State Board of Education 1891, 1893, 1897).

In an attempt to demonstrate how children get to their school, I found that probably most of the children walked or rode on horseback. Small gave an interesting statement when she said that children of an early small school in Whitman County had to furnish their own textbooks and other materials, including a slate for "figuring" and practice work. She also refers to her lively experience as a student when she and her friends had the two-gallon water pail with long-handle dipper, walked to school or rode on horseback, depending on how far they had to go. She said some children lived 3 miles from school. This may not differ from the situation children in Elberton had to deal with. Dora Banning, a former student of Elberton public school, presents a similar image by stating "... I walked through the main part of town while before, I crossed over a small stream, climbed over the R.R. tracks by the big watering tank. .. and up to the school."

Digging into the history of school facilities and activities, I discovered that there were very few substantial facilities provided by the school for children. Apart from the schoolhouse and some teaching equipment, only the School District Library, which housed approximately 50 volumes of reference and textbooks collected from 1888 to 1900, was available. J. Orin Oliphant's statement in 1972 suggests that educational and social activities in the school were held occasionally.



*Elberton flour mill*

### **The School During the Booming Days (1901-1920)**

This period witnessed several new developments. In the early years of this period the increasing number of pupils is a reflection of an outside population influx to the town. This corresponds to the statistical records which list a large number of industrial companies. Some sources say that the period between 1900-1908 was Elberton's peak period. There were more pupils than the school could accommodate. The community had to rent a store building in downtown area. Most pupils at this time were in the elementary school classes. High school enrollment actually decreased during this period. J. Orin Oliphant recalls that the high school classes never had more than fifty high school pupils and two attending teachers. Daisy Busbey, who made a study of Whitman County schools in about 1918, provides a confirmation as her census reveals that the average number of high school pupils at Elberton public school from 1910-1915 was only 18.4 (Table 1). While small, the high school was said to be the finest around.

**Table 1. Number of Enrollment and Average Attendance of Elberton Public School (1910-1915)**

Census	1910-11	1911-12	1912-13	1913-14	1914-15
<b>Total Enrollment</b>	137	119	124	124	93
<b>High School Enrollment</b>	13	17	23	25	14

(SOURCE: Daisy Busbey, n.d.)

In addition, names of teachers of the school, starting from 1904-1918 were derived from R. L. Polk & co.'s Directory of Whitman County, Washington. These directories provide names and administrative position or job of individuals such as principal, director, and janitor. Interestingly, the school directors as indicated in the directories came directly from Elberton itself. For example, Charles A. Price, who served as a school director in 1904, was working as an agent at the Farmers Warehouse Co. However, there was no indication of the length of the term that a director served, but some sources suggest that the school had a new director every year. That means a director might serve only one year. More interestingly, there were censuses showing that most teachers came from the East and Middle West such as Pennsylvania (W. LeRoy Wyle in 1910), Michigan (Aldie M. Anderson in 1910), Iowa (Nanny E. Hays and Isabella N. Hays in 1920), Missouri (Myra Moffett in 1920). This conforms with Oliphant's record that says .... all the teachers there in those years were young persons who had received a classical education in colleges or universities of the Middle West...."

Throughout this period, children still walked to school. Some went home for lunch but some brought lunch with them; so did the teacher. This suggests that there was no school lunch program. It is also likely that the school did not have teacher's cottage. According to a survey of rural school conditions in Whitman County in 1915-1916, only 4 of 120 schools had a teacher's cottage.

Regarding activities that the school held for children, high-school baccalaureate exercises, revival or protracted meetings, and occasional debates as Oliphant mentioned were organized by the school. Most of social and academic activities held at the school were still rare. The school had no indoor gymnasium but did have a small play ground behind the schoolhouse. Various community activities were likely centered within other structures in the town. There were a number of places where such activities were held, such as the Elberton Picnic grounds, the dance pavilion, pool hall, and even the river.

One more thing that marked the history of the school during this period was the



construction of another schoolhouse in 1916. It was said that the original wooden schoolhouse was burned down and a new two-story brick schoolhouse was built on a cement foundation in standard English increments on the same size. It had 6 or 8 rooms, according to the account of the Whitman County Retired Teachers Association of 1976. As the picture suggests, this new schoolhouse was well-designed and probably more durable than the older ones. This new schoolhouse reflects an improvement of school facilities. According to the conclusions of a survey of rural school conditions in Whitman County through questionnaires conducted in 1915-1916, each schoolhouse had to be built somewhat in response to requirements of the school. For example, the schoolhouse should have appropriate window space, room light, color, interior finish, location of cloakrooms, etc.

Another new development was educational curriculum. In terms of the course management, elementary classes were divided into eight different grades using the Department of Education's Teachers' Manual for the Elementary Schools of the State of Washington. For the outline course of study, please see Appendix B. At the same time, the Whitman County's County Superintendent of Common Schools had developed "An Outline Course of Study for the Common Schools of Whitman County, Washington" to be used in connection with the State Manual. As the Whitman County Superintendent (1905) said, the county's outline course of study had been prepared as a supplementary course to the State's Manual. This development demonstrates the efforts to improve educational standard by authorities at both state and local levels.

### **The Period of Decline (1921-1943)**

While the school system in the Whitman County was improving, the Elberton public school system faced declining enrollment. Periodic floods and occasional fires during the years 1913-1914 signaled the dark future of Elberton. At the very beginning of this period, the school was faced with rapid decrease in number of students. Imagine that in 1920-1921 the school had only sixty-two students and four teachers. At that time the salary of principal was \$1660, and average salary for male teachers was \$1440, and \$1225.47 for female teachers.

The major school problem during this period was not one of size, organization, or administration, but the declining enrollment. It was said that by the 1930s the population of Elberton dwindled from six hundred to about two hundred people. Furthermore, by the 1940s many families had moved away from Elberton. As a result, the school had to close its doors and was consolidated with Garfield School district in 1943, leaving behind only the razed remains of a foundation.

## **SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF A CHILD'S SPECIAL YEAR IN REPUBLIC, WASHINGTON**

**Catherine Mathews Friel**

If you have read the copy of the Spokesman Review article of November 7, 1911, regarding John W. Mathews, my father, a Pullman, Washington attorney who was hired by the Ferry County Commissioners of Washington as a special prosecutor to wage war against crime in Republic, Washington, you have learned that he did indeed carry on his "anti-vice crusade" in that small mining town for the year 1911-12. Attorney Mathews moved his family to Republic for that one year.

As a nine year old child, I remember vividly the small white house my parents rented, their being very fortunate to find it available, although it did not have enough bedroom space. Consequently, my father had to make a portable bunk bed that could be placed over the bathtub for my younger sister to sleep on.

Winters that far north, on the Canadian border, are very much colder than they are in Whitman County, we soon learned. There were sinks in the kitchen and bathroom, but no indoor toilet. Oh, I still shiver recalling the feeling of that bitter cold trek to the outhouse outback! At night, of course, at times it was very dark. We had no flashlights in those days, so my father took an empty tomato can, tipped it sideways, put a wire bail on it, and inserted a short, fat lit candle to guide us children to and fro that freezing wooden outhouse. I still recall those ice cold toilet seats on my little bare bottom. Years later I saw a cartoon, a winter scene, showing a wooden outhouse with toilet holes rimmed with strips of animal fur. I remembered our Republic cold outhouse and thought, "Oh, wouldn't that have been a great idea!"

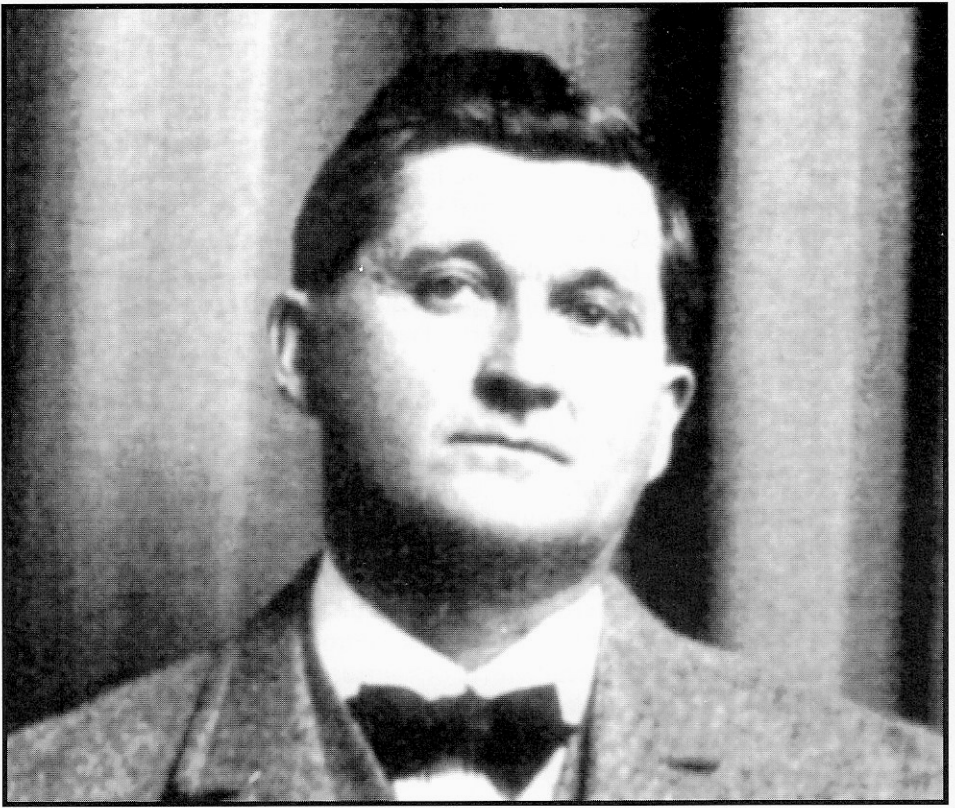
All in all, it was a unique year's experience for every member of my family. My brother, a sophomore in high school fell in love with a classmate, a beautiful dark haired, blue eyed Irish girl, Marie Moran. Marie was one of Mike Moran's younger sisters. Mike, a large handsome young man was one of the high school skilled football players. Later he attended the State College of Washington, now University, between 1910-1920 and made a name for himself on the varsity football team at "Moo College" or "Cow College" as were the apt nicknames for this agricultural college at that time.

My brother never forgot his first and deep love for Marie Moran, but she was a Catholic in faith, and my father, although professing no particular protestant religion, in fact an agnostic, quite typically of the time, curtailed the continuance of the romance between these two precious people. Because of my father's untimely death at age fifty-two, when he was Mayor of the City of Pullman, he was never aware of the ironic fact that all three of his children married Catholic spouses, not extremely devout, but of Catholic heritage! Today in America we are torn apart by continued "religions," and "racism" has never disappeared either. Even to this day after centuries of some societal efforts for rectification, religious differences cause personal heartaches and world wide wars among nations as before. Twentieth Century Progress? No! Not yet?

While pursuing his mission in Republic to close illegally run businesses, my father was not at all popular in this small rough, tough town. In fact he received hate mail constantly which frightened my mother and us children. One picture postcard I can still see vividly in my mind's eye. It was a night scene, a bright full moon in the upper left corner of the card shining down on a large, black tomcat with arched back and straight as a standard tail, standing atop a high wooden fence in the center of the picture card. From all other directions, with good aims came flying objects: old shoes, bedroom slippers, hair brushes, an alarm clock, etc., at that tomcat which, of course, represented my father, Prosecutor Mathews. My father laughed at these continued arrows, and this particular card was a show piece later in life when he was recounting his experiences in Republic.

John Mathews fought "booze" aggressively all of his life. We always told him that he should wear a "Temperance White Ribbon" on his lapel as all the crusading Temperance Women wore on their shoulders declaring their hate for liquor. He was in a position to see personally the disastrous financial results for families when the hard working father spent his weekly paycheck at one of the local saloons on his way home from work each night. This attorney was as equally opposed to the sale of cigarettes, "cigareets" as he called them, as he was to alcohol. Even a century ago - a whole century ago, people referred to cigarettes as "coffin nails," - quite a record for the tobacco companies to continue to convince most of the public for over a hundred years that tobacco in any form was harmless, and get away with such groundless assertions. How can a whole society, I wonder, be made up of such dumb people, educated and uneducated, for over a hundred years?

I had never seen the Spokesman Review article about my father's year in Republic, Washington, as a special prosecutor in 1911-12, until I found it recently among other inherited papers of earlier years. As I read it, I had to laugh at myself because all of my many years my parents had told me it was many illegally operated "saloons," not Red Light District Houses that my father was trying to close. Hence, as I told this story over the years, I bragged that my father put nine of eleven "saloons" out of business in Republic in the early part



*John Mathews, Pullman attorney*

of the century, never suspecting that they were “houses of ill-repute,” and not saloons. As a child, I would not have known what a “house of prostitution” was even if told of such.

Judging from these accounts of my youthhood, one can realize how many drastic changes I have seen in our society during this twentieth century.

5/17/97

## **HISTORY OF STEPTOE**

**Lola Crumbaker Humphrey**  
**February 4, 1978**

The beautiful little town of Steptoe is nestled in the Palouse Hills near Steptoe Butte and is on the original stage coach route connecting Walla Walla to Colville. The original trail is only a few feet from the Steptoe Grange Hall.

A number of settlers, mostly homesteaders, were in the area, and as the fertility of the soil became known, more and more families arrived especially from Tennessee, and this is how it was given the name Tennessee Flat.

Soon the need of a school was evident. One was built just east of the cemetery along with the Woodman of the World Hall. The hall was later moved to the present day School Play Field. The school house was also moved into Steptoe and became the home of Lee and Betty Roberts.

On August 6, 1876 a United States Patent Title was issued to Mary J. Renshaw for 160.44 acres. On January 28, 1878 Mary J. Renshaw deeded the acreage to Calvin Troop for \$900.00. The cemetery acreage was given by Calvin and Mary Troop. It was dedicated May 31, 1884 as the Bethel Cemetery. The first burials were four small children who had died of diphtheria, probably in 1877.

The Post Office and trading post was built in 1901 north of Steptoe. Bill Davis was the Post master. It was at the Virgil McGrady home site.

On March 29, 1902 Mary E. Troop, a widow, deeded the property to William H. Woodhouse for the consideration of \$137.20.

On June 21, 1905 William H. Woodhouse and wife Lizzie A. Woodhouse deeded the property to A. C. Carter at the rate of \$52.00 per acre. It was set up as follows. \$1,000 upon delivery of contract; \$1,000 on July 1, 1905; the balance upon receiving possession of the property on or before November 1, 1905.

On November 1, 1905 William H. Woodhouse and wife Lizzie A. Woodhouse deeded the property to A. C. Garter before R. J. Neergaard, Notary Public at Oakesdale, Washington, for the consideration of \$13,356.72.

On November 2, 1905 A. C. Carter and wife Nadora N. Carter deeded the property the Railway Land and Improvement Company, a Corporation, no consideration was expressed.

On January 24, 1906 Mary E. Troop, a widow, deeded the property to W.E. Goodspeed for the consideration of \$1.00.

Steptoe was founded as the result of building the Colfax Branch of the Spokane and Inland Empire Railroad. In 1906 the Railway Land and Improvement Company in conjunction with Arthur D. Jones, a Spokane Realtor, bought up acreage for the Railroad and many lots. The company plotted the town, planted trees, made a few sidewalks, named the streets, and the resurvey of Steptoe was signed and dedicated to the public, and they gave it the name of Steptoe. The big celebration was May 31, 1907.

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Crider cooked for many of the track layers. Many of them were housed in tents. There were several Italians in the crew and they batched and did their own cooking. Many became very ill and it was discovered they were eating too many of the big eyed chickens better known as owls.

A stock yard was built along the railroad track where the cattle and hogs were loaded and shipped. It was near the Cenex Fertilizer Plant site.

The first home built in Steptoe was built by Cy Smith just behind the Tom Hall residence.

The Steptoe Community Church was first erected near the Tom Sharp home in 1890-91. In 1902 it was moved to the present site.

Nels Nelson was the head carpenter. Some of the early ministers were Leo Totten, Bill Russel, C. N. Herford, and D. Raven.

Art Jacobson is the present minister (1978)

The Pleasant View Baptist Church was built in 1904 and moved into Steptoe in 1920. It closed its doors in 1937.

The early day Chop Mill was operated by Charlie Schmauder. The Livery Stable and Dray Service was east of where the Cominico American Fertilizer stands now. Some of the owners were John Bramberick, Coon Kleaveno, and Casper Miller.

The Odd Fellow Lodge built a hall in the early 1900's. The hall was also used by the Rebekahs. It is now the present Steptoe Grange Hall. No.1005.

The first General Store with dry goods and groceries was known as the Hub Store, owned by D.H. Johnson and located at the later site of the Wayne and Nora Kinsinger home. When he opened his doors the first day, Richard Hall,

age 17, was waiting, and he went in and bought the first bag of peanuts.

Charles Euler opened a general store and the Post Office moved to the back of this building. It was located where the grocery is located now (1978).

The Trombridge Hardware Store was located where the Steptoe Fire Station was built.

Ollie Cooper opened the Steptoe Trading Co. He had hardware, dry goods and groceries. He operated his business on the site of the Steptoe Grange Hall.

A newspaper, the Steptoe Standard, was printed by Mr. Jones, but it was short lived—only printed about one year.

Many businesses soon followed. Early butchers were Ed Fostic, Henning Brothers, Archie Milne, and the three Broyles Brothers.

The Ice houses were back of the Grange and near the home of Bill Ratliffe. They worked in conjunction with the Meat Markets in the stores and butcher shops.

Early Depot Agents were Dilly, Piersdorf, and Gallop. Early section crew foremen were: first section crew foreman, Fred Taylor, Second section crew foreman, Ellis Portwood. Six passenger trains went through Steptoe each day, three north and three south to Spring Valley. There was also a daily Freight Train. Housing was available for the section crew foreman and the depot agent.

Early residents of “Punkin Holler” were Gosney, Portwood, Shaunacey, Bill Lewis, and N. Foster who kept the Bethel Cemetery beautiful for years using a hand powered mower and a few hours each day.

An early day hotel was located near the Cloy Harvey home and was operated by John and Della Bexford. There was a hotel near the Duty Blackburn home. It was a restaurant and hotel operated by Webb and Maryann Conklin.

The blacksmith shop was owned and operated by Turpin and Son. The first owners were K. Belko and John Eastep.

In 1908 the new school house was built with eight grades a few years later two more stories were added. By 1916 it was a four year high school. Gladys Lloyd Staiert was the first graduate. The high school closed in 1957. The lone graduate was Jelene Kinsinger Crampton. Our high school students are now taken to the Colfax High school by school bus.

When the Gym was dug under this school, some of the men using horses and fresnos were Dean Lewis, Dewey and Vernon Sharp. The new gym was built in 1949-1950.

In 1913 the Northern Grain Company was built—later the Interior Warehouse. Both changed hands several times before being sold to the Colfax Grain Growers.





With the coming of bulk wheat in 1915 an elevator was built by Hall, Miller and McNabb.

The Methodist Church was bought and turned into a dwelling by M. C. Hanley. It was the former Rev. C. M. Hereford home, now

(1978) the home site of Hazel Hall. Mr. Henley lived here while his home was being built—the present home of Georgia and Dewey Sharp.

Mr. Henley in 1915 opened the Steptoe State Bank. A few years later Richard Hall bought the controlling interest, and in 1924 it was sold to the Colfax National Bank. The Post Office then moved into the building.

The water system was put in around 1915-1920 by John Richards. The fuel company was run by Tom Sharp. Early barbers were Romeo Jasper and Frank Wetzel.

With the coming of autos several garages were built. Early operators were Charley Follis, Maxx Stromberg, and George Northrup. In 1923, Dell Mitchell and Lee Hunt leased Charley Follis's garage. Later Dell moved in 1924 to the present location, and is still in business with his son David Mitchell.

Steptoe has always been a haven for cops. In the early day—a flag pole was set in the street between the store and the fire station. The deputies made all the arrests. Frank Wetzel was the justice of the Peace. Traffic Court was held each day, and the proceeds were split between the Justice of the Peace and the arresting official. THE CRIME? The violators had not gone on the proper side of the Flag Pole!

Business was good for years, but as more cars and better roads were built, business began to dwindle down, stores closed and people moved away. Many of the old buildings have been torn down.

At the present time, 1978, we have a garage, a gas station, a grocery store with a post office and lunch counter, the Wheel Inn Restaurant and Motel, a mobile home park, a thriving grade school, and the Steptoe Community Church. A prosperous community with two fertilizer plants, a pea plant, a seed plant, the Steptoe Grange Hall No. 1005 and a sewer system, completed in 1977, costing just under \$500,000.

I wish to sincerely thank the following people for helping to compile this information: Grayce Neergaard, Richard Hall, Dewey and Georgia Sharp, my wonderful husband Howard Humphrey, Beverly Harvey, Kristi Kinsinger Miller and Marge Farrow for typing it for us.

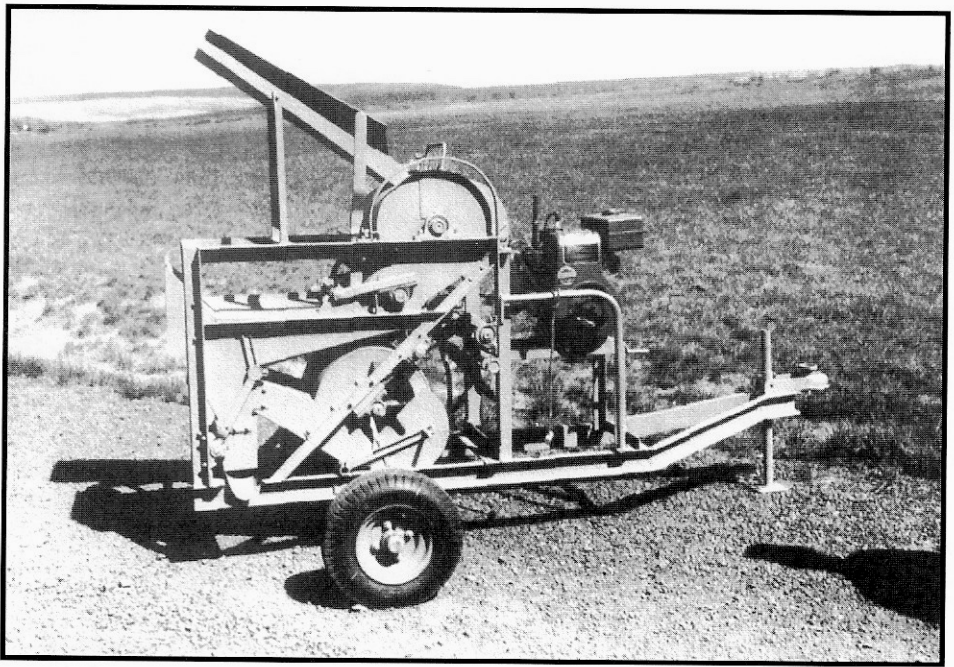
**ORVILLE VOGEL**  
by  
**Clayton Reis**

**Part 2 - Continued from Previous Issue**

In 1959, Vogel accomplished another major technical advancement. He replaced his old three-row plotter that he had developed in the early thirties with a semi-automatic eight-row seeder. Three men could now easily seed 5,000 eight-row plots per hour. Almost any station's experimental plots could be seeded in a day, ensuring uniformity of seeding conditions. This was very important because to be as scientific as possible a station needed rapid planting so that all seeds could be planted under similar conditions. This enabled scientist to dismiss weather as a factor in their research for producing better crops. In other words, weather's effect on planting operations became less of a factor. The Vogel planter became so successful that many Vogel seeders and manufactures' copies remain in use in the United States and France.

Between 1970-1972, Vogel built his crowning achievement—the ultimate test plot combine. This new machine was large compared to his older machines, but it was built much the same as a traditional farmers' plot combine, except that it had been built with the scientific characteristics that where essential to handling test plots. The Vogel combine could harvest an entire test plot replicate, eight feet wide, in one bite, clean itself, and take another bite ten seconds later. The machine revolutionized test plot technology by dramatically speeding up the harvesting process, and still remaining true to the scientific needs of the researchers. In line with his earlier engineering experiments, Vogel drew up the original design for the machine on the living room floor of his house in Pullman, Washington. In fact, this is how most of Vogel's inventions were drawn up—no small accomplishment when considering the intricacies involved and the knowledge and expertise required.

In order to operate as the ultimate research tool, the combine could not allow the grain from one plot to mix with the grain of another plot. Vogel designed the machine with an air jet system that was manually controlled from the operators seat. As the combine gathered in plants from a plot, it cut, threshed, unloaded, and then cleaned itself in ten seconds. It speeded up operations and radically transformed the harvest process for researchers. It allowed the scientist, sitting in the operator's seat, to study the harvesting characteristics of potential new varieties of wheats as they were being processed.



*First Vogel thresher*

Even after his retirement, Vogel continued to work at Bill's Welding, tinkering with many new inventions. One of his last inventions was a commissioned research combine that was smaller than the other machines and designed specifically for use at the Lind Dryland station by Dr. Ed Donaldson and other scientists who worked on projects there. In his newest combine for Donaldson, Vogel added some specific improvements that he thought would be helpful and unique to the Dryland station. In typical Vogel style, even after developing the ultimate combine, he continued to find room for improvement

### **Vogel's Impact on International Agriculture**

Dr. Vogel had a significant impact on international agriculture, because his revolutionary ideas were carried to Third World countries where they enhanced agriculture production. There, Vogel's most significant role was laying the ground work so that Dr. Norman Borlaug of Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maiz y Trigo (CIMMYT), a research station in Mexico that was funded by the Rockefeller institution, could develop the "Mexican Dwarf" variety. This new variety, an expansion of Vogel's semi dwarf ideas, revolutionized wheat production in India, Mexico, and Pakistan.

In 1953, Dr. Borlaug received winter wheat varieties from Vogel with the already perfected Norm 10 dwarfing genes that were by now heritable because of Vogel's efforts. Dr. Borlaug then had to convert the selection into so-called spring wheats, that would work best in the warmer climates. Vogel had per-



*Vogel Combine at Lind, WA.*

fecting the dwarfing genes so that they would be better suited for winter and earlier fall planting. This meant that the genes Vogel provided to Dr. Borlaug were considered winter wheat. Unless these winter wheats went through a process call “vernalization,” where the winter frost “tells” the wheat to start growing, the winter wheats failed to produce grain. Dr. Borlaug had to solve this problem: converting the wheat selection into a spring wheat that did not need winter frost to promote vernalization.<sup>22</sup>

The Mexican Dwarf wheat that Dr. Borlaug eventually developed revolutionized wheat production in India, Pakistan, and Mexico, much the same as Gaines and Nugaines had revolutionized Pacific Northwest wheat production. Just as Vogel had shown United States wheat breeders the incredible yield potential of shorter wheats, Dr. Borlaug applied Vogel’s ideas worldwide. In the late 1960’s and 1970’s, the application of these ideas sparked what became popularly known as the “Green Revolution,” where Third World Countries experienced a dramatic increase in agricultural production. The shorter wheats that Vogel perfected and the Mexican Dwarf that Dr. Borlaug adapted to the new environment are now grown on five continents and occupy a land area that is equivalent to the nation of Bangladesh.

In the 1960’s, Dr. Borioug won the Nobel Prize for his work in developing the “Mexican Dwarf” wheat which had helped to produce the “Green Revolution.” Dr. Borlaug, in a letter supporting Vogel’s nomination for the Edward Browning Award (an award that was given to people of outstanding contributions in the

Agronomy Field and an award for which Vogel was a candidate), pointed out that the success of his Mexican Dwarf wheat was indirectly the byproduct of Vogel's research.<sup>23</sup>

As Dr. Vogel's reputation grew with each success, foreign countries asked for his assistance as a special advisor for USDA's overseas projects. In 1965 and again in 1967, Vogel visited Mexico's CIMMYT under sponsorship of the United States Agency for International Development. Dr. Vogel met there with Dr. Borlaug and discussed problems of improving production and the quality of the semi-dwarf wheats.<sup>24</sup> Borlaug's interaction with Vogel underscored the USDA scientist's role in worldwide wheat production.

In 1968, Vogel visited Turkey and consulted with Turkish authorities and recommended a wheat program for the Anatolian Plateau. He made these recommendations to both the Turkish government and a follow-up study team. In both instances, the special consultants closely followed Vogel's recommendations.<sup>25</sup> That same year, Vogel toured Australia, Japan, and New Zealand, where he assessed their wheat-breeding progress and advised them on how to improve methods and become more efficient.<sup>26</sup>

### **Vogel as a Benefactor of Mankind**

Orville Vogel was not only a great agronomist, he was also a great man. His work for the agronomy community exceeded the laboratories and spilled over into the community. The town of Pullman was much better place because Vogel lived there and Washington State University experienced scientific advancement because of his work.

Some have said that Vogel was the "Daddy" of the Spielman Agronomy Farm. It is fairly well known that Vogel's scientific contributions helped make the Agronomy Department at Washington State University one of the best in the world. What is less known is that Vogel's hard work and sharp eye are responsible for the nice land that the Agronomy Department researchers have to use. Vogel was familiar with the Pullman landscape because of his many hunting and fishing trips. On these trips, Vogel took a mental note of the lands that would be best suited for an experimental farm for plant breeders. Vogel had looked for uniform land, deep, fertile Palouse soil, and a southern exposure. Vogel found this ideal setting on the Mennet farm, a plot of land adjacent to the old Moscow Pullman highway. Others in the department agreed with Vogel, and the land was acquired. Sometime later, Vogel learned of an adjacent eighty acres of land that would add greatly to the station's field laboratory. The chance to buy this land would pass in less than twenty-four hours because another group was interested in buying the land the following day. Vogel could not be certain that the university would, or could, come up with the money to support the purchase, so Vogel approached a farmer he knew, Roscoe Cox, and persuaded him to "put up" the needed 10,000 dollars. The Washington Wheat Consumers and Washington State University realized the value of the land and reimbursed Cox shortly thereafter. Without Vogel's initiative and risk taking,

the university would never have acquired the land which is widely considered the best field laboratory in the region.

If Vogel is the “Daddy” of the Spielman Farm, then he is the “Father” of the Farm House, a fraternity that Vogel brought to the Washington State University campus. Vogel was an alumni of the fraternity from his college days back at the University of Nebraska, and he helped the fraternity organize in Pullman by finding it a small residence just west of the President’s mansion. Vogel then helped organize a fund raising drive to gain the money for the Farmhouse to purchase a permanent site. Once they secured the site, Vogel put his engineer skills to work and was instrumental in helping them build the house. Vogel remained active with the Washington State University Farm House for forty years. Rod Bertramson, Chairmen of Agronomy Department, remembers attending church one morning and looking across the street and seeing the elderly Vogel up a thirty foot ladder painting the roof. When Bertramson stopped to ask Vogel why he was doing such dangerous work, Vogel replied “Well, the boys might get hurt doing this.”<sup>27</sup> Clearly Vogel was a “get the job done” kind of man.

## **Conclusion**

Orville Vogel’s impact on agriculture in the Pacific Northwest and the world is immeasurable. Vogel brought leadership and innovation to a profession that welcomed his contributions. Vogel was not the type of man to wait and hope that someone else would get something done. Vogel was the type of man that made sure that things got done.

As an agronomist, Vogel produced innovative ideas to further advance research methods. Vogel shattered existing beliefs on the best ways to genetically alter plants. Using these methods and incorporating his uncanny ability to recognize the strengths in each wheat selection, Vogel was able to develop successful wheat varieties. He also dispelled the myth that shorter wheats could not produce high yields. Vogel disagreed with experts that said shorter wheats would never work Vogel put the time and effort into the shorter wheats and literally made them work. With the release, of his crowning success, Gaines, Vogel had the last laugh as semi dwarf wheats broke all production records

Vogel used his inquisitive mind to think of improvements and advancements for the technologically-inferior test plot machinery. Before Vogel there had been very few technological advancements In test-plot machinery and the work was being done by hand. This was a painfully slow process and expensive because of the amount of labor that needed to be employed to get the job done. Large farm machinery was not the answer because these machines were built for speed and were not scientific enough to do the job. Vogel questioned and came up with solid answers to these problems of time and precision that were hampering research agronomist. His machinery brought about a much needed change as the test plot technology moved into the twentieth century. There was such a lack of technological advancement throughout the world, that Vogel’s

inventions were duplicated and used around the globe.

Along with scientific and technical advancements in the United States, Vogel's successes opened the doors for bright men in other parts of the world to manipulate and add to his ideas. One of these men, Dr. Norman Borlaug, manipulated Vogel's semi dwarf wheats to spawn the much needed "Green Revolution" that helped to feed starving countries. Without Vogel's initial breakthroughs millions of people around the world would have gone hungry, longer then they had to.

Vogel was the unique kind of man that questioned the status quo and was relentless in his pursuit to make things better. Just because an idea had never been done or was not an accepted belief, did not stop Vogel from trying it. At times this brashness could be irritable and Vogel was demanding, but his colleagues respected him, because he demanded the same out of himself. The local farmers also had immense respect for Vogel. He was their hero in the agronomy department. When Vogel held informational meetings for the local farmers to explain his new variety of wheat, farmers came from miles around to hear him speak. The joke around the agronomy department after seeing all these farmers so attentive to one man, was that when Vogel spoke, farmers listened. In some points of his career, Vogel was disillusioned with working for the government. Vogel felt that lesser men were being appointed to higher jobs because of political networking and not because of success. There might have been some truth to this, because despite all the money that Vogel brought to this area, he was never a rich man. However, Vogel gained more then riches in his forty years of agronomy. He was a successful innovator and a successful person. In the end, Vogel left the agronomy field with an unbelievable amount of respect from his peers. Men who knew and shared a friendship with Vogel over the years still think of him fondly and often. One man, working in the small town of Pullman, Washington, proved to be a giant, by starting scientific ripple effects world-wide, and revolutionizing his field of work.



22 IBID.

23 Letter from Dr. Borlaug supporting Orville Vogel's nomination for the Edward W. Browning Award in 1972. Cage 524, Box 8, Pile 254, MASC, Washington State University, Pullman.

24 Summary of Observations during and following the 1966 tour into Mexico, Orville Vogel. Cage 524, Box 7, File 238, MASC, Washington State University, Pullman.

25 Booklet on Expansion of Wheat Production in Turkey, 1964. Cage 524, Box 7, File 213, MASC, Washington State University, Pullman

26 Pamphlet assessing improved high protein crop cultivation for developing countries, 1971. Cage 524, Box 7, File 211, MASC, Washington State University, Pullman.

27 Bertramson to the author [oral interview], February 16, 1995, Pullman, Washington.