

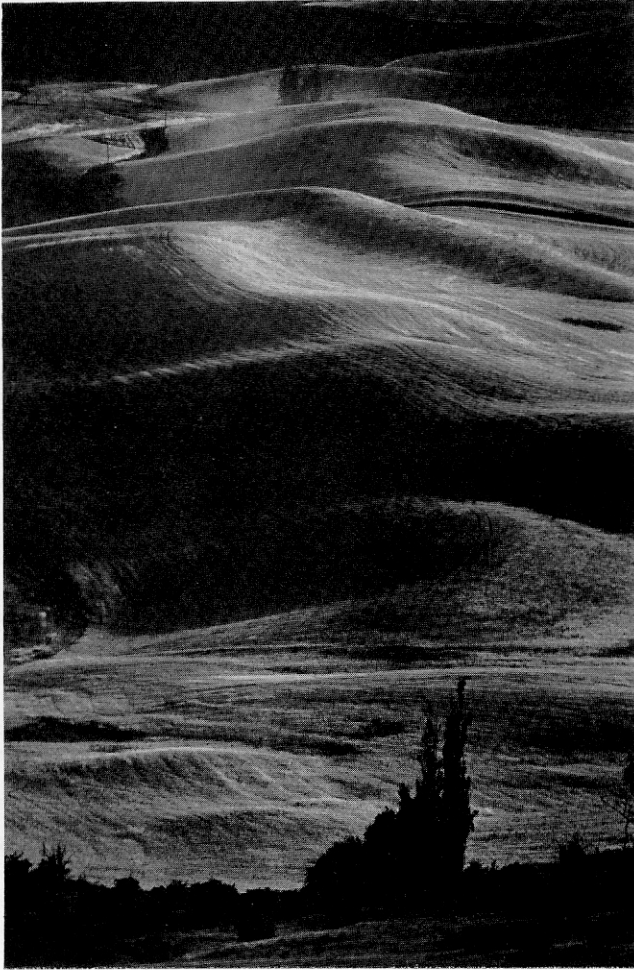
Bunchgrass Historian

Whitman County Historical Society Quarterly

Volume 15 No. 3

Colfax, Washington

Fall 1987



**Palouse Country
A Photographic Sampler**

CONTENTS

Palouse Country by George Bedirian	3
Colfax IOOF and Rebecca Lodge by Edith Erickson	20
Publication of Note	24

THE AUTHORS

George Bedirian is an editor for Washington State University. His book, Palouse Country, a Photographic Essay, is scheduled for publication in January, 1988.

Edith Erickson of Colfax is the author of a history of Colfax, a history of place names in Whitman County, and various other items on local history.

The Bunchgrass Historian is published four times a year by the Whitman County Historical Society. Its purpose is to further interest in the rich past of Whitman County.

OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

President Robert Luedeking
Vice President Don Hilty-Jones
Secretary Vivian Hamm
Treasurer Barbara Jean Collins

PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

Editor Lawrence Stark
Associate Editors Suzanne Myklebust
Fred Bohm
Editorial Consultant William F. Wilbert
Subscriptions Gwenlee Riedel
Circulation Editor Margo Balzarini
Back Issues Susan Bohm

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

Contribution Range
—Basic Membership \$7.50-\$12.50
—Contributing or Family
Membership \$12.50-\$24.50
—Sustaining Membership \$25-\$49.00
—Sponsor \$50-\$99.00
—Patron \$100 and up
—Life Membership \$500
—Business Membership \$25.00 or more
Membership in the Whitman County
Historical Society is tax deductible to the
extent permitted by law.

SOCIETY ADDRESSES

Society Business:
Whitman County Historical Society
P. O. Box 67
Colfax, WA. 99111

Memberships and subscriptions

Gwenlee Riedel
Membership Committee
Whitman County Historical Society
SW 220 Blaine
Pullman, WA 99163

Articles for Publication:

Lawrence R. Stark, Editor

The Bunchgrass Historian

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

Current and Back Issues:

(Send \$2.50 per issue)
Susan Bohm, Sales Editor

The Bunchgrass Historian

SW 405 State Street
Pullman, WA 99163

Palouse Country:
Introduction to a Photographic Essay

by
George Bedirian

*Introduction — The lead essay of this issue of **Bunchgrass Historian** features a preview and sample of **Palouse Country**, due for release in the upcoming months. The text presented here is virtually the same as in the book. Needless to say, all photographs accompanying this article are courtesy of George Bedirian. — Editor*

The last quarter of the 19th century was a time of rapid growth in the Palouse. Pioneer farmers were transforming the virgin grasslands into wheatfields. On the Snake River, steamboats were doing a thriving business carrying grain to market and bringing large numbers of people into the Palouse, many of whom settled along the river, where the long growing season and the ready accessibility of shipping made fruit growing profitable. As orchards sprang up along the riverside, so also did the towns of Central Ferry, Wawawai, and Penawawa, which became important shipping centers for the produce of the new land.

The upland communities were also thriving. The most substantial buildings of almost every Palouse Country town were constructed in the years that spanned the turn of the century. The old schoolhouse in Farmington, the St. Elmo Hotel and the Powers Block in Palouse, the Bank of Rosalia, the First Baptist Church in Oakesdale, and the Roman Catholic churches in Colton, Uniontown, and Sprague — all were built between 1889 and 1902.

By 1900, a system of railroads connected the towns to one another and brought them prosperity — or at least the promise of it. The author of an 1893 promotional booklet on Washington's Whitman County used the coming of the railroads to clinch his argument for the desirability of settling in Uniontown: “. . . lots in Uniontown which can be bought at low prices on easy terms now, will soon be selling for double the present prices and for cash. The Great Northern railroad is building toward Uniontown and expects to have its line completed to that town by January 1st, 1894, and then the boom will begin. You will never have such a grand opportunity to 'get in on the ground floor' as at present, and if you let the year 1893 go by without investing in Uniontown you will miss a golden opportunity but will have no one but yourself to blame.”

Even before this was written, the Spokane and Palouse Railroad, a branch of the Northern Pacific, was carrying passengers south to Uniontown. Because travelers had to disembark at this point and continue their journey by stagecoach, the town, already a key storage and shipping center for grain, acquired additional importance as a terminal and transfer point. By the opening of the 20th century, it boasted several hotels, an opera house, and more. As a growing community, and as the focal point of developing locale, its continued prosperity seemed assured.

Though blatantly promotional in its intention, the passage quoted above reflected a genuine optimism about the future that pervaded the entire region. J. Arthur Hanford, writing in *Oakesdale Memories*, recalled that his father, E.H. Hanford, “Thought in the early days that Oakesdale had a good chance to become a sizeable city, and went so far as to plat an addition to the Town of Oakesdale in our field...and even started preparation for a water supply.” There was good reason for Hanford's optimism. Oakesdale at the century's turn was a thriving community of some 2,000 souls. Eight churches served the spiritual needs of the townspeople, and an equal number of saloons quenched their thirst. With a full complement of businesses besides — including “the pride of the Palouse Country,” the Oakesdale Opera House — and with three railroads linking the town to the outside world, it was little wonder that E.H. Hanford saw house lots sprouting in his field.

Though it equaled Oakesdale in population, the town of Palouse, or Palouse City, as it was then called, looked forward to an even brighter future. Three hotels, two banks, and one of the largest lumber mills west of the Rockies lent weight and importance to the town, as did a substantial population of dentists, pharmacists, and lawyers. Tailors and dressmakers clothed its people, a resident photographer recorded their faces on film, the Palouse General Hospital cared for them when they were ill, and an undertaker buried them when they died. The Powers Opera House at-



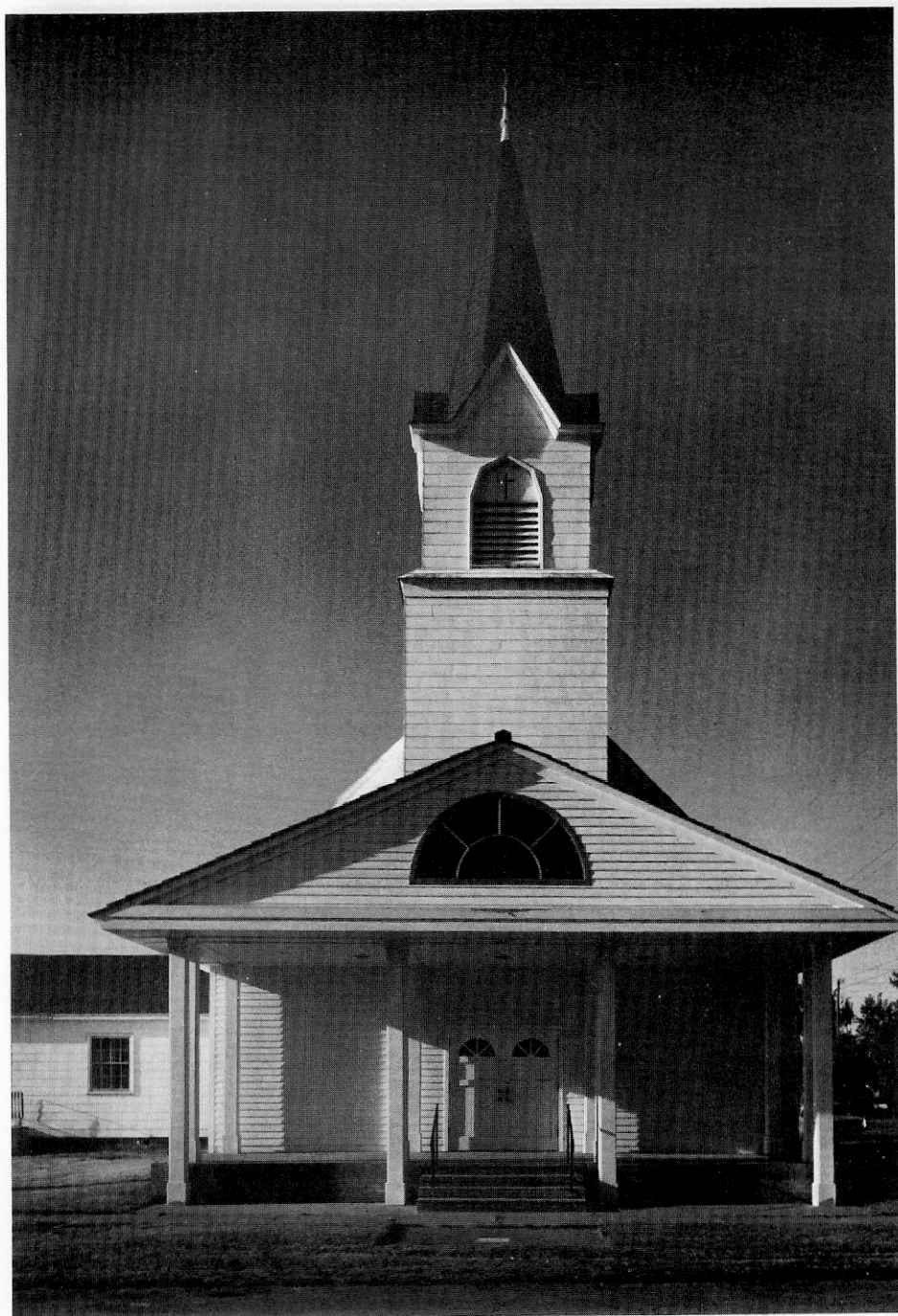
Steptoe Avenue, Oakesdale, WA

tracted medicine shows and traveling theater companies from the East and provided a forum for such luminaries as Carrie Nation and Victor McLaglan. Even Theodore Roosevelt included Palouse on his western itinerary. Clearly, it was a town to be watched.

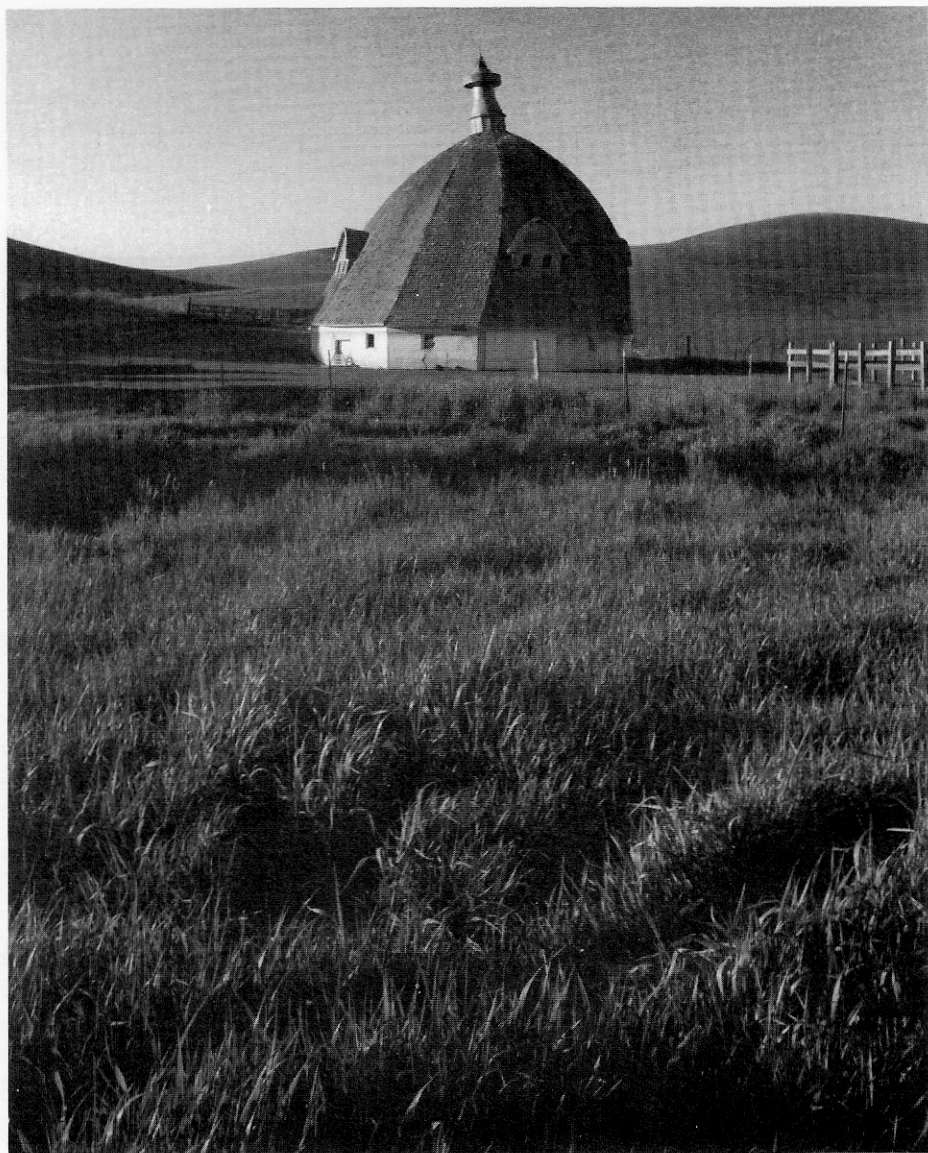
To one degree or another, the same youthful vigor that animated Uniontown, Oakesdale, and Palouse characterized a score of other Palouse country towns. Each provided important commercial, social, and cultural services to the people of its district, and each was a vital part of a balanced order of things — a decentralized, small-grained order that worked for the benefit of both town and country and that, for all anyone knew, was destined to go on forever.

But a chain of events was already in motion that was to undermine the stability of that order and change it irrevocably. It began with the coming of the automobile and the transition from horse-drawn to self-propelled farm machines. Together, these two phenomena were to transform the face of the countryside, drain the Palouse of much of its population, and cut short the development of the towns so severely as to spell the demise of some and a diminished existence for many others.

The automobile created a need for improved roads and highways and thus brought an end to the relative isolation of the towns. This in turn meant that people no longer had to depend exclusively, or even primarily, on the towns for goods and services. Consequently, one local business af-



First Baptist Church, Oakesdale, WA



Richard Hall Barn, West of Steptoe, WA (Demolished, June 1985)

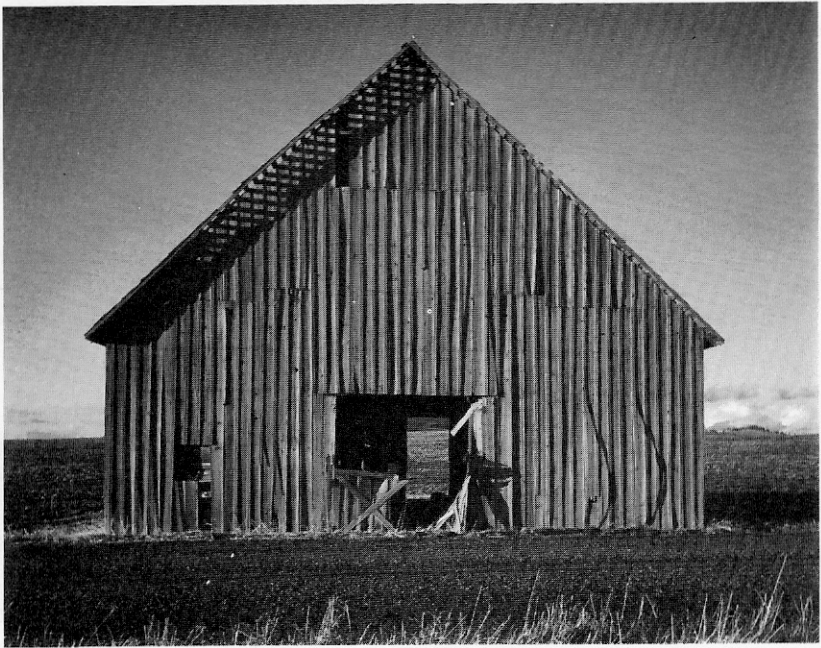
ter another shriveled and died. Tradesmen and merchants closed up shop and moved on, followed by the people they had once employed. Institutions suffered too. The academies and colleges that had flourished in Colton, Palouse, Colfax, and other communities succumbed to declining enrollments and inadequate funding. Church memberships evaporated, and many churches themselves disappeared. When the young, seeing no future for themselves in their own communities, chose to try their luck elsewhere rather than to stay, the downward spiral became irreversible.

Not every town suffered this kind of decline. Because they hosted the land-grant colleges of their respective states, Pullman, Washington, and Moscow, Idaho, continued to develop. Today they are well-established as the commercial, educational, and cultural nexus of the Palouse. Colfax, the seat of Whitman county, enjoys a corresponding preeminence as an agricultural service center and the locus of a large number of county agencies and government offices. And the towns of Endicott, St. John, Garfield, Rosalia, Tekoa, and Fairfield have retained their vitality as farming communities.

For the rest, however, the wave of change that engulfed the Palouse was catastrophic. Some, like Pampa and Wilcox, were swept away so completely that nothing remains of them but their names. Some, like Diamond, Ewan, Thornton, Elberton, Winona, Dusty, Pine City, Hooper, Johnson, and Lancaster, function more as rural communities than as towns. And some — including Uniontown, Colton, and Albion — live on, but at a slower tempo than before. Almost everyone of these communities presents a gutted and eroded face marked by empty lots, vacant storefronts, and unused, decaying buildings — the diminished, battered remains of that old seemingly stable order.

The changes in the countryside that attended the transition from horse-powered to motorized farming were equally disruptive. Before the advent of the new machines, farms had been forced to remain relatively small — a few hundred acres at most. Plowed fields were interspersed with horse pastures, and in many places commercial fruit orchards flourished on the hills. Because farming was labor-intensive, the countryside provided seasonal employment for large numbers of people — and regular employment for teachers, who educated the children or farmers and farm hands in the many schoolhouses scattered throughout the Palouse.

The new machines made it possible to raise a larger crop with less work, and they increased the productivity of the Palouse many times over. To the farmers who used them successfully, they brought prosperity. But to others they brought unemployment and displacement. Because they could be used profitably only on larger acreages than were available, they precipitated a cycle of buying and selling, the result of which was to con-



Lowell Hargus Barn, Whitman Co., WA

solidate the many small farms into larger ones. And because they required fewer people to operate them than the horse-drawn rigs of old, those who had previously depended on finding work on the farms watched their jobs evaporate before their eyes and joined the exodus from the countryside. As the rural population thinned, so also did attendance at the country schools. Teachers found themselves without work, local school districts were absorbed by the towns, and the schoolhouses, abandoned now, were torn down to make way for the expanding fields.

These alterations in the social fabric of the Palouse were accompanied by corresponding changes in the physical landscape. Because the use of horses was on the wane, fewer pastures were needed, and they were plowed over. And since motorized farming firmly established the supremacy of wheat culture in the Palouse, the orchards that once held promise as cash crops became irrelevant and were cut down. The farmsteads that were abandoned in the process of consolidation have virtually disappeared, and all that remains of them today are a few deserted farmhouses and barns that stand like islands in the midst of the surrounding fields.

The barns of the Palouse are, in fact, the most numerous relics of the premotorized era and the most interesting and conspicuous architectural features of the rural landscape. Displaying a rich profusion of styles, these structures are superb examples of the vernacular architecture of the region, and they stand as organic expressions of the life from which they

sprang. But because they no longer serve their original purposes of sheltering animals and storing the hay that fed them, many remain vacant and unused. And although some have been converted to other uses, as a class of buildings they are slowly disappearing from the Palouse.

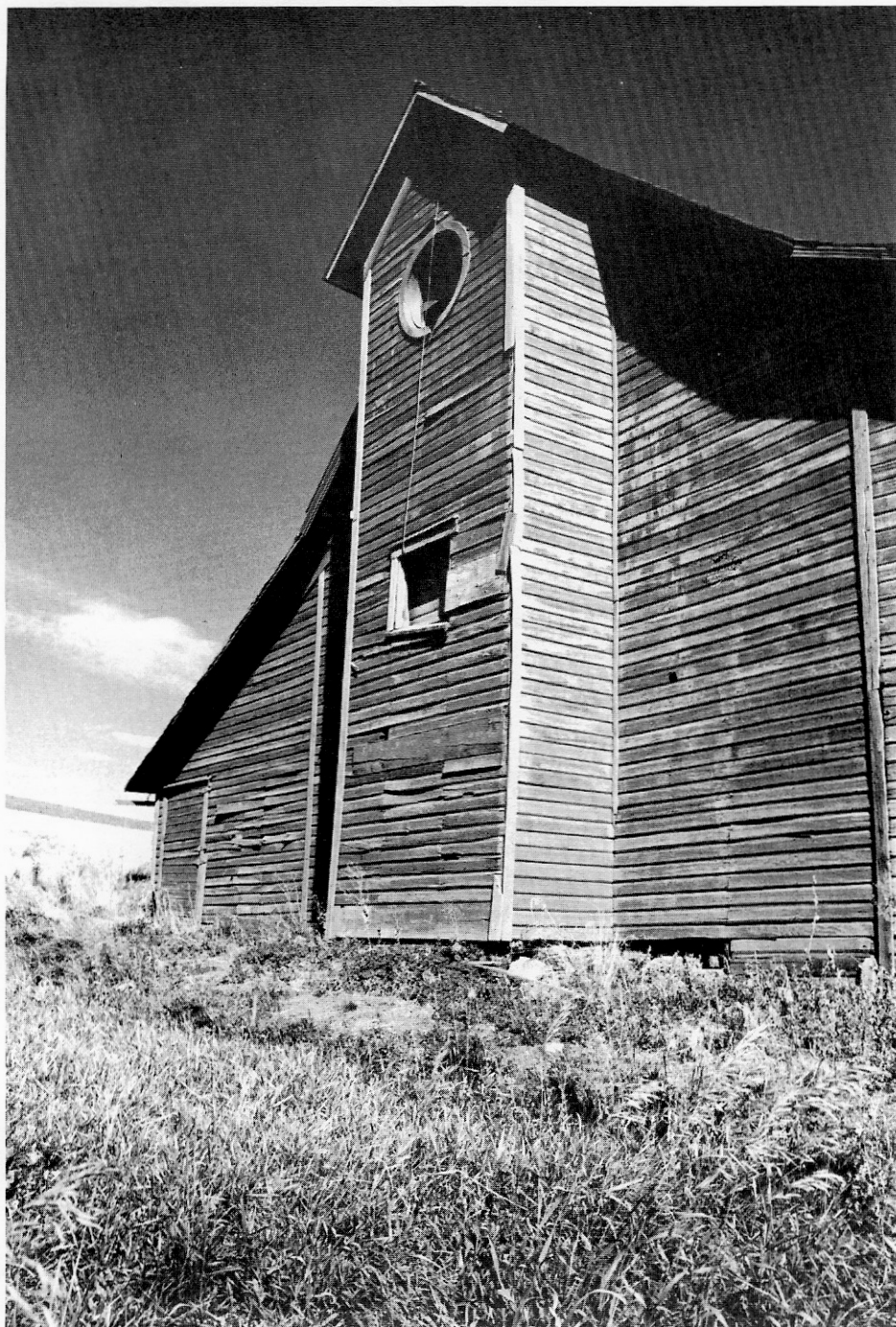
Of the 25 barns depicted in this book, for example, two no longer exist and two others are damaged beyond repair. The century-old Herb Mohr barn near Colfax, Washington, and the Thelma Gray barn in Viola, Idaho collapsed during the winter of 1984-85. The Richard Hall barn near Steptoe, Washington, and the Elmer Blackman barn near Malden, Washington, were deliberately destroyed. The loss of the Hall barn, famous for its round design, was particularly severe, since it was one of only three round barns in the Palouse. Structural weaknesses, coupled with the lack of funds necessary for its rehabilitation, made it necessary to destroy the barn. Of the two round barns that remain, only one displays the arched dormer treatment. At this writing, the other round barn, the Leonard barn near Pullman, has been nominated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, reflecting an emerging awareness of the value of such buildings.

All across the Palouse, however, scores of less exotic but equally elegant barns are suffering the ravages of age and neglect. Each year the weather takes its toll of these structures, stripping off a few more roof shingles or loosening another wall board or two, bringing them, in the absence of any human intervention, closer to their demise.

It could be argued that, though regrettable, the deterioration of these barns is simply a longer-term adjustment to agricultural progress than the other changes described above, and that their eventual loss is part of the price the Palouse must pay for becoming one of the most productive grain-growing regions in the world. A high price for progress — but not its highest. Perhaps the severest problem which that productivity has visited on the Palouse is the erosion of its soil which, if it is not curtailed, may yet offset the benefits of increased production.

Though soil erosion has always been associated with farming in the Palouse, its severity increased dramatically when tractors replaced horses and more land was placed under the plow. Between 1939 and 1977, the Palouse lost an average of 360 tons of soil from every cropland acre. According to the *Palouse Cooperative River Basin Study*, published in 1978 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, “such a rate of erosion could remove approximately 2 inches of topsoil from all [Palouse River] basin land in less than 40 years.”

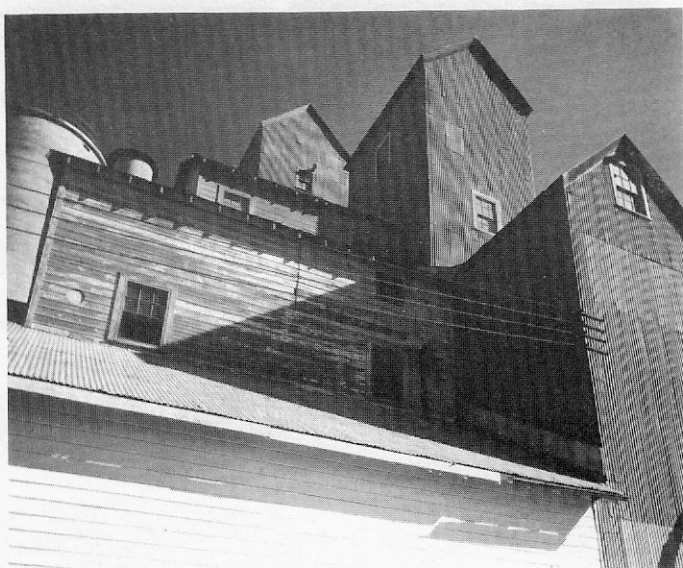
The use of chemical fertilizers, high-yield wheat varieties, improved tillage methods, and better chemical weed sprays has tended to counterbalance the loss of so much soil and has enabled the Palouse to de-



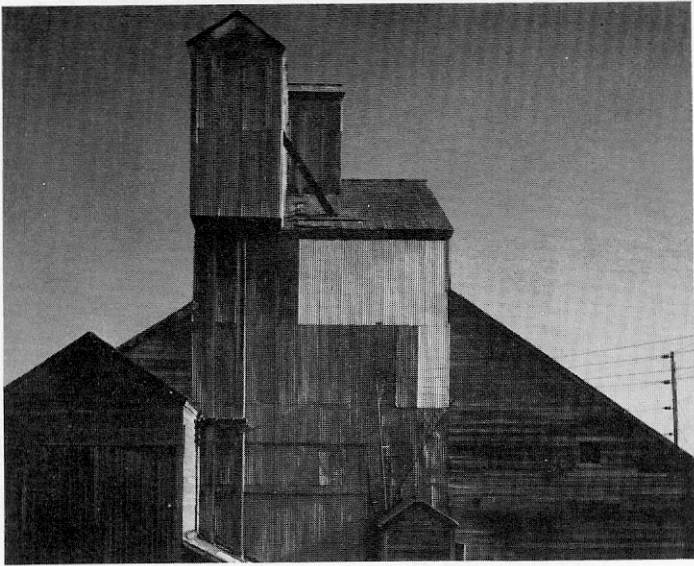
*Anderson Barn, North of Genesee, ID
(Formerly Our Saviours Lutheran Church)*



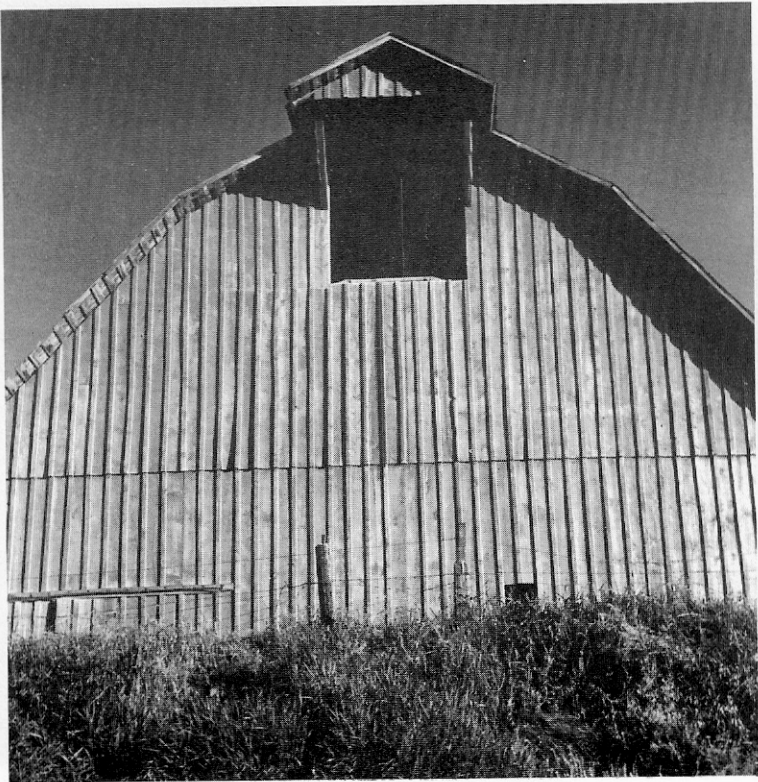
Rosalia Christian Church, Rosalia, WA



Rosalia Producers Inc., Elevator #415A Rosalia, WA



*Dumas Seed Company, Elevator on Highway 195
South of Pullman, WA*

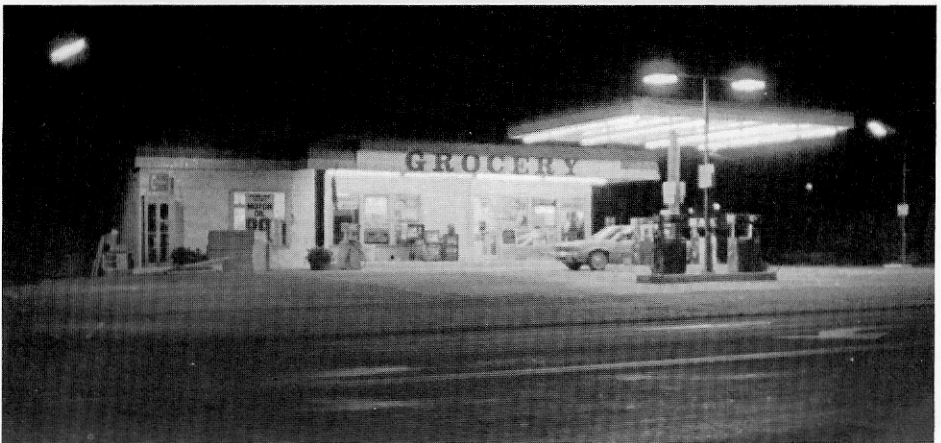


Francis Hill Barn, Whitman Co., WA

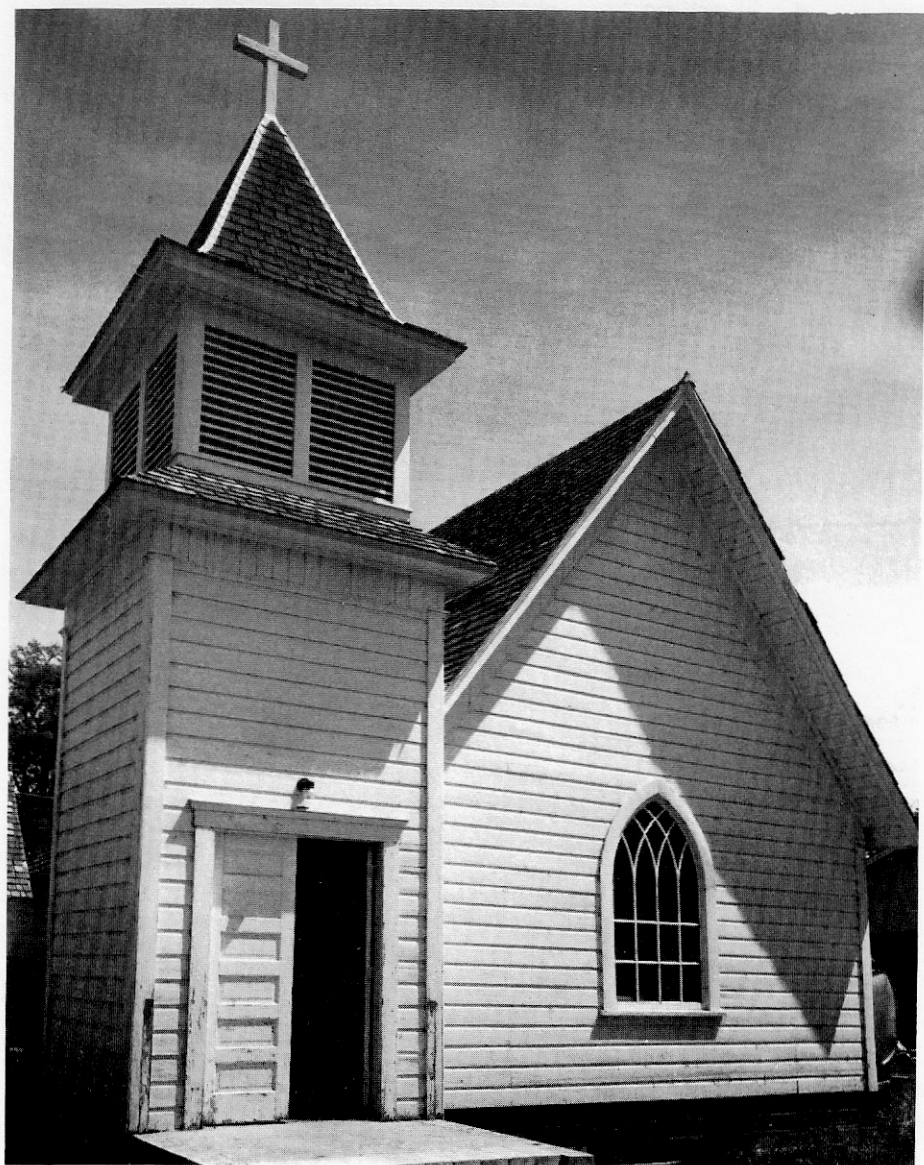
liver record crop yields in recent years. But whether these factors can sustain such productivity in the face of a pattern of erosion that seems to defy all efforts to curtail it, is far from certain. It seems reasonable to assume, rather, that unless a breakthrough occurs in conservation, productivity, or both, the effect of continuing erosion will be a decline in productivity which no amount of technology will be able to offset.

Bill Woolston, in the foreword to his photographic essay, *Harvest: Wheat Ranching in the Palouse*, estimates that 120 years of farming remain for the Palouse. If this is true, then greater social, economic, and ecological changes are ahead for the region than any it has known since it was settled. Conceivably, the Palouse will accommodate itself to the gradual destruction of the fertility upon which its social and economic foundations rest, and it will build a new foundation for itself. But it is equally conceivable that the current order of things is too entrenched to allow for change — that the old ways will persist to the end and the Palouse will become a living embodiment of William Jennings Bryan's dictum: "Burn down your cities and leave your farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country."

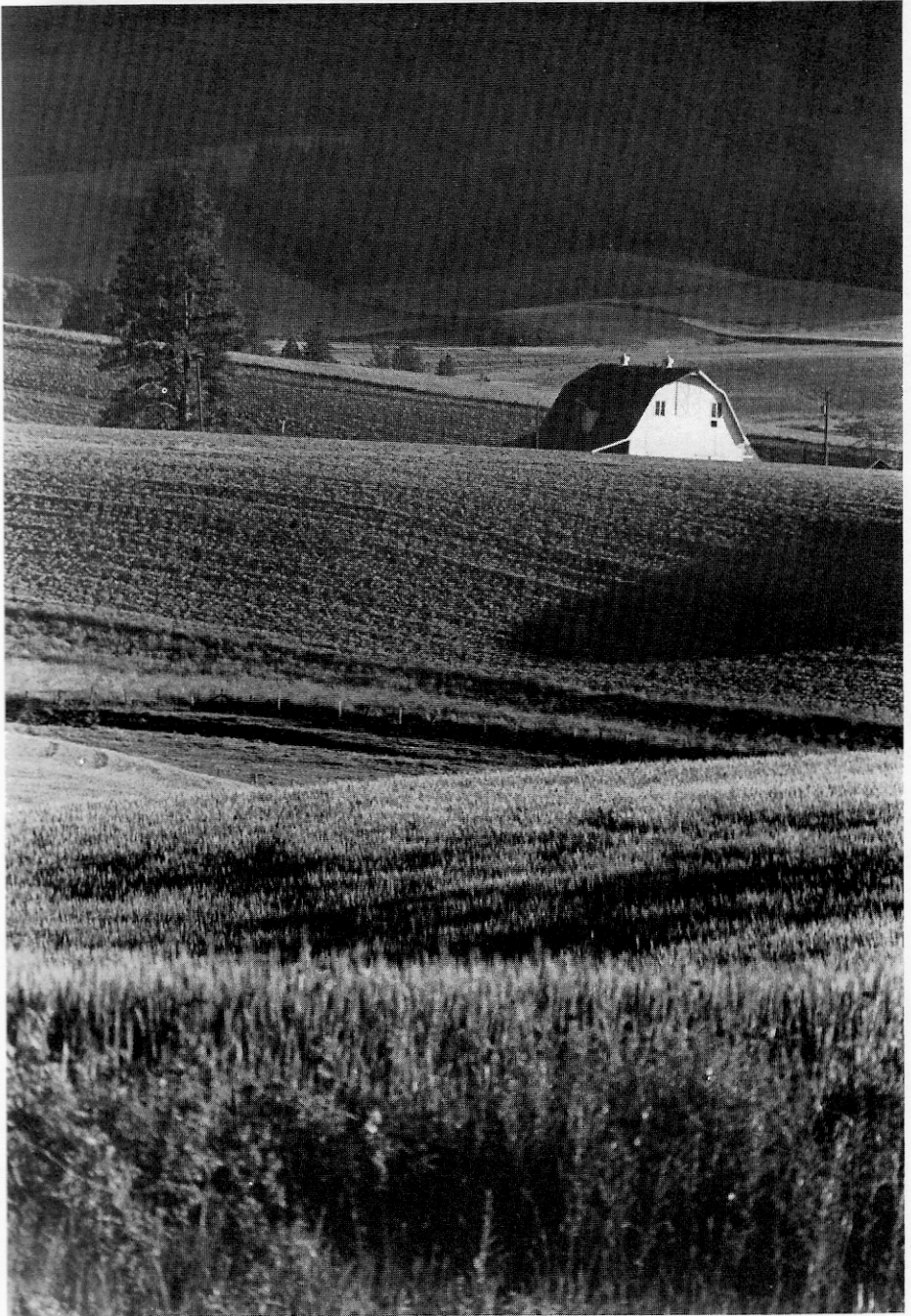
Whichever way the pendulum swings for the human community of the Palouse, the essential Palouse — the Palouse of nature's making — will remain. This will hold true, I believe, no matter how many cycles of human change we wreak upon these hills. Our presence in the Palouse is only an episode, after all, in a natural history that predates human memory and that will endure long after we are gone. And though we may strip these hills of the loam that nourished the bunchgrass and wildflowers of the past, the soil that remains will bear other grasses and other flowers. And they will reclaim the Palouse as their own.



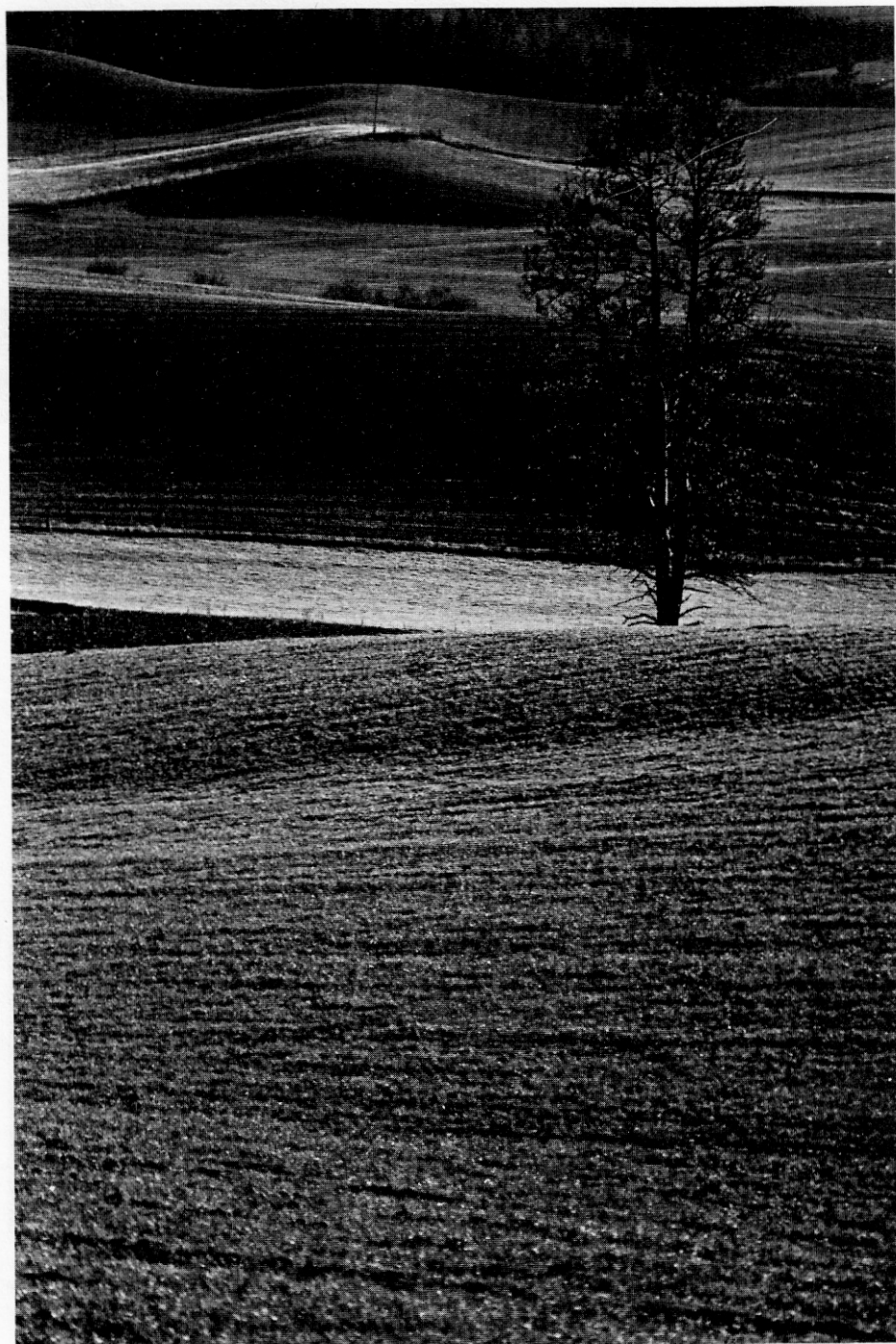
Jackpot Food Mart, Colfax, WA



Starbuck Community Church, Starbuck, WA



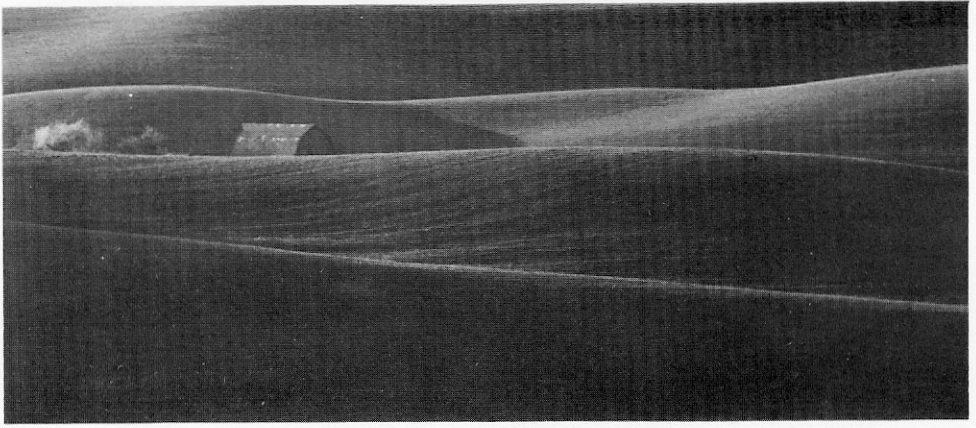
Spring Fields, South of Potlatch, ID



Spring Field, Latah Co., ID



Palouse Parts and Supply, Palouse, WA



Hillscape, West of Pullman, WA

It will be as though I carried some human thing—
a metal pail, perhaps — into a field of meadow grass,
and forgetting why I held it in my hand,
set it down and left the field forever.
Year after year the summer grass grew tall around the pail,
and the winter grass blew down and died,
leaving the pail exposed and open to the sun.
And when the weather had beaten it to rust,
it fell away, flake by brittle flake,
into the receiving earth,
and not a sign remained that it had ever been.
Where I had walked, and where the pail had stood —
where men had toiled by day and lovers had lain by night—
where crops had grown
and footfalls had echoed down the empty streets —
Everywhere upon that field, which stretched away now
into the farthest reaches of the Palouse,
fresh green shoots were sprouting
through the old dead stalks of last year's growth.
Spring had come again,
and the grass, which had never really died,
was playing out once more
the cycle of its own renewal...
...just as it always had...
...just as it always would...
George Bedirian

Colfax I.O.O.F. No. 14

and

VERONA REBEKAH LODGE NO. 13

by

Edith Erickson

In the early days fraternal organizations were established as soon as churches. Colfax was no exception to this rule. In fact the first fraternal organizations came three or four years before the first church was officially organized.

One of the early, but not the earliest, fraternal organizations in Colfax was the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) No. 14, which was instituted June 13, 1878 with eight charter members. The next week a hall was obtained from the Masons who had been organized for about five years. This hall was rented for one year at \$200.00 a year.

One of the many duties of the early lodges was to help in time of illness or death. If a member was ill the investigating committee would check as to the seriousness and length of the illness. If they found the member to be eligible he would be given \$5.00 a week as long as necessary.

In 1884 the lodge rented a hall from J.L. Heatherly and Bancroft for \$42.00 a month and sublet it to the Knights of Pythias, Masons, and the Ancient Order of United Workmen to help pay the expenses.

In 1885 they purchased an acre of ground south of the city cemetery to bury their deceased members. The price was \$51.00 for the acre. That same year they began working toward the establishment of an auxiliary, which was called a Rebekah Lodge. This was not completed until 1887.



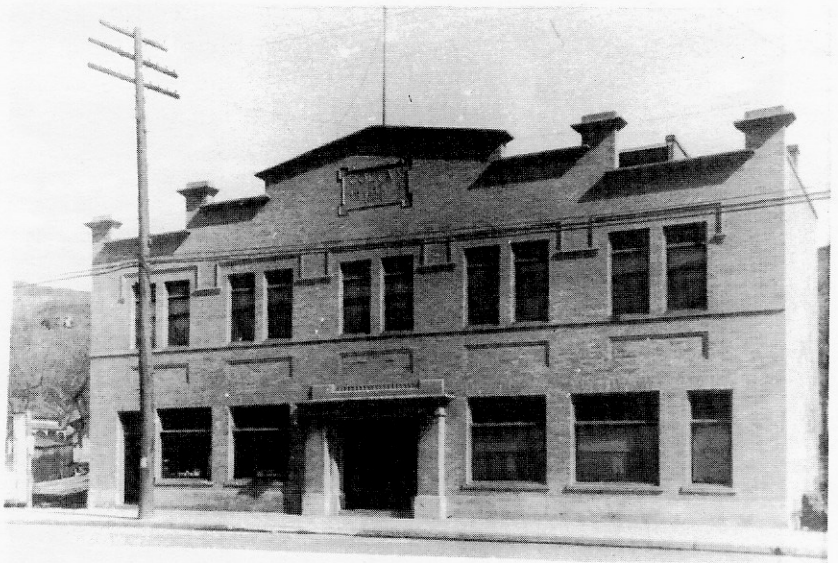
*Easter Party in the Lodge Hall, no date
photo courtesy Edith Erickson*

In 1888 Colfax I.O.O.F. and Rebekahs entertained the State Grand Lodge. The state organization had been established the same year as the Colfax Lodge No. 14 had been instituted. Within two years from the time the state organization was established it contained twenty local lodges and over six hundred members. The state meeting at Colfax was large considering the size of the town.

In 1889 J.A. Perkins offered to sell the lodge a 35 foot lot on Main Street and then to rent the downstairs for 5 years. It ended up being much more than 35 feet. The Masons and Odd Fellows advertised for bids in July 1889 for a building "80 by 80 feet three stories high! It is still one of the largest buildings in Colfax. It was completed in 1890. The rear foundation wall is the best ever constructed in Colfax according to some recent estimates. They maintained this hall until about 1920, when they were unable to meet the expenses, so they were without a hall of their own until into the 1920's when they purchased half interest in the building that had been built by the Knights of Pythias in 1913. This building was completely purchased from the Knights of Pythias in 1968. In the basement of this hall a bowling alley was established in 1948.

During World War I the lodge invested in war bonds, and donated considerable money to the work being done by the local and national Red Cross.

Twice Junior Odd Fellow groups were established and after a few



Lodge Hall, 209 S. Main Colfax, ca. 1914; photo courtesy Edith Erickson

years interest waned and they surrendered their charters. The first group was established in 1936 under the leadership of Edgar Layton. The second group, with an initial number of over 50 boys, was instituted in 1960 under the leadership of Einer T. Erickson. During the time the second group was active four high school boys won the state I.O.O.F. scholarship of \$1,000 each.

Through the years Colfax #14 instituted lodges at Steptoe on July 17, 1908, Endicott about 1905, and LaCrosse on January 26, 1906. Steptoe consolidated with Colfax in 1938 and the property was sold the following year. LaCrosse and Endicott consolidated with Colfax in 1940. In 1979 Palouse and Bengé became part of the local lodge.

Through the years the local lodge has had three Grand Masters (State Presidents). These have been Ed Heidenreich in 1941, Irvin Lenoker in 1965 and Frank Holland in 1973.

The Verona Rebekah Lodge #13 was instituted by the Odd Fellows on December 30, 1887. It was first called Naomi but they soon found that Waitsburg already had that name so their second choice was Verona.

At first they rented the attic of the old Baptist Church at \$6.00 a month. The original dues were 50 cents a quarter for men and \$1.00 a year for women. The second and third years the lodge was very inactive but in April 1891 they began to get on their feet again. Many money making activities were held to keep the lodge going and to aid the Odd Fellows.

In 1898 the officers and a drill team instituted the Pullman Golden-

rod Rebekah Lodge #87. On May 2, 1905 they instituted Rhodendendron #166 at Endicott, on December 14, 1907 Dunlor Number 193 at Lacrosse and in 1916 Mt. Steptoe No. 275 at Steptoe. As time went on these three consolidated with the Verona Lodge at Colfax. Endicott consolidated in 1918, LaCrosse and Steptoe did not join until 1933.

In 1925 the Rebekahs moved into the hall at 209 South Main that had been purchased by the Odd Fellows.

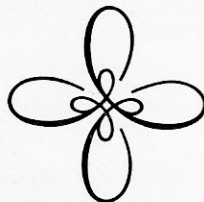
When the banks closed in 1932 the Rebekahs lost some of the money that they had been able to accumulate.

During the years they also "adopted" both a boy and a girl at the Walla Walla I.O.O.F. Children's Home. Adoption meant helping support the children while they lived in the Home.

The lodge has had three State Assembly presidents. Margaret Inman held that office in 1904, Pauline Lust in 1949, and Hulda Holland in 1983.

During the years the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs have sponsored Leanne Wood, Marcia and Helen Faires as delegates to the United Nations. Adults from the local lodge that have made the trip as chaperones for the state groups of young people at different times were Pauline Lust and Everett Taylor. These trips have been sponsored annually by the I.O.O.F. and Rebekah groups all over the United States and Canada for many, many years.

Long time Verona Rebekah members are Georgia Woodward Mills, initiated in LaCrosse in 1919, Russie Moulton Lubben, an associate member initiated at Rosalia in 1920. Initiated at Colfax are Goldie Longhofer Jones, 1921, Georgia Cochran Crampton, 1922, Grace Copley, 1923 and Helen Porter, 1930. Edith Mitchel, 1929, and Glayds Stairet, 1930 were initiated in Steptoe.



● Publication of Note ●

Seven For Oregon

by Cornelia Shields

Green Springs Press, Dayton, WA (1986) Softbound — \$9.95, 231 pps., photos, maps

Cornelia Shields' fascination with the Sager children and the Whitman Massacre goes back to a 1963 visit to the Whitman mission as a child of two. In "Seven for Oregon" (subtitled "A Novel Based on the Sager Family's True Adventure"), she has written a gripping account of the westward journey of the Sager children by covered wagon and their life and final ordeal at the Whitman mission.

Henry and Naomi Sager started west with their six children by ox-drawn wagon from Missouri in the spring of 1844. During their long journey to Oregon with an emigrant team, a seventh child was born, and both parents succumbed to illness. The orphaned Sager children continued on with other members of the train. The first third of the book tells of their journey and final arrival that October at the Whitman mission.

In the middle section of the book we learn of their life in their new home at the mission and how the seven Sagers found a mother and father in Narcissa and Marcus Whitman.

When the Cayuse attacked the mission three years later, the two Sager boys were killed and the youngest child died of illness a few days later. Ms. Shields gives us a fascinating account of the massacre and its aftermath. The final chapter sketches the later lives of the four surviving Sager girls.

The Sagers have touched Whitman County history in several ways. Matilda Jane Sager Hazlitt Fultz Delaney (1839-1928) is buried in the Fultz plot in the Farmington Cemetery. She and her second husband, Matthew Fultz, had operated a hotel in Farmington. After his death in 1883, she continued to run it herself with help from her children. (See *Bunchgrass Historian*, Summer 1977 and Spring 1976.) Other Sager descendants have and do live in the Palouse region.

This book is highly recommended for its skillful combination of good narrative style with historical accuracy.— R.L.