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- **Albert Reaney: An Early Pullman Entrepreneur**
 - **The Almota Race**
 - **Murder in Room Six**
 - **The WSC Student Strike of 1936**
-

Whitman County Historical Society

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COVER PHOTO

Reaney House circa 1898

Photo Courtesy of WSU Library

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Albert Reaney: An Early Pullman Entrepreneur by Miriam Stratton, with research by Dorothy Sevier Matson | 4 |
| The Almota Race - by George Hatley | 11 |
| Murder in Room Six - by Anna Lee Church | 13 |
| The WSC Student Strike of 1936 - by Robert Luedeking | 18 |

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Reaney Hall about 1906, just left of center. The wooden building to its right was a blacksmith shop, now the site of the Cougar Plaza.



Reaney Hall after 1908 - Bloomfield Block in right corner built 1908. Pullman Chop Mill under construction between Reaney Hall and Bloomfield Block. Sacred Heart Catholic Church in left foreground.

ALBERT REANEY, AN EARLY PULLMAN ENTREPRENEUR

**Written by Miriam Stratton with Dorothy Sevier Matson,
Researcher**

Albert Reaney came to the Pullman area in 1874, locating on Missouri Flat Creek. He proved to be visionary in improving the times and culture for the people of Pullman. He was also a creative businessman, though not always successful. Albert married Mrs. Phoebe Larkin in 1877. Mrs. Larkin's first husband had been killed accidentally by a fall from a horse in 1875.¹ In 1880, the Reaneys took up a homestead where College Hill residences now stand.²

In 1887-88, Albert erected what would be known as Reaney Hall on the site of the present Neill Public Library, facing the original road through Pullman.³ Reaney named it the Pullman Opera House, although locals called it simply Reaney's Hall.⁴ The presence of the new two-story building immediately raised the level of culture and recreational pursuits for the area. The opera house, situated on the second floor, was projected to seat 600 people with a stage, scenery, wings, and dressing rooms.⁵

A variety of businesses operated out of the first floor. For example, Staver and Walker rented it, then T.L. Bramel sold farm implements from the first floor. Over the years, Reaney tried a flour exchange and a dry cleaning business in the building. Also, Pullman's first bowling alley opened there in 1898.

On the second floor, a variety of concerts, drama and opera productions by local performers and stars from across the nation offered Shakespeare to musicals for the delight of Pullman residents. Minstrel acts also came to town and advertised their shows with a Grand Avenue parade in full-dress uniform. There must have been some concerns over the probity of these types of shows because one such promised, "The performance is strictly moral."⁶

By 1890, after several minstrel shows had come to town, the populace indicated that they had had enough. The newspaper critique offered "the program consisted of a re-hash of all the old minstrel 'chestnuts' which have been in Pullman for the past two years."⁷ Stock companies also trooped through the area, bringing some old time actors, famous at the time, to perform for the local population. Local talent also abounded and performed popular stage plays of the day such as Pygmalion and Galatea. Pullman citizens performing in dramas and melodramas included Thomas Neill, W.V. Windus, Harry DePledge, Tobe Newton, J.J. Sargent, Mrs. Sargent, Lulu Neighbor, Alice Heywood, and many more.⁸ The Guy Dramatic Company performed under the direction of Mr. E. Rice and J.M. Hogan. The Pullman Dramatic Union also performed at the hall. In all, Reaney's Hall was a showcase for national and local talent, professional and amateur.

In 1888, Reaney built a new stairway at the rear of the hall to give two exits in case of fire.⁹ This proved a fortunate addition. During a school exhibition the next year, the flame from a lamp set fire to a wall behind the scenery. The audience panicked and made a frenzied

rush to exit the building. Had the fire not been extinguished immediately, serious injury could have occurred to those jamming the exits. Fire was not the only concern of the hall's patrons. Concert customers complained of cold in the winter and requested a stove to be put into the east end of the hall. "It required a good performance to entertain an audience that is freezing to death," commented the *Pullman Herald*. A light on the stairway would be helpful, too, it urged.¹⁰

Reaney continued to improve the stage, appointing E.E. Hall to paint a new drop curtain and wings.¹¹ Ever cognizant of the necessity to try to please his entire public, Reaney set aside a smoking room "for the benefit of those who indulge in the weed," the *Pullman Herald* reported.¹²

Reaney did not limit the use of the hall to stage events, however. It served as a meeting place for the community, housing such functions as Republican rallies, meetings of the Board of Trade, and citizens meetings. Ladies of the Methodist Church sponsored a New England supper, schools held exhibitions, and balls during Thanksgiving and Christmas brought out the community.¹³ The Thanksgiving Ball of 1889 was pronounced a success. Mrs. Squires and Miss Elbert served refreshments, following the music and dancing.¹⁴ Ticket charges for the Christmas dance of 1888 and catered supper were \$2.50, \$1.50 without supper.¹⁵ "The Band Boys" held a masquerade ball on New Years Eve in 1889. The ball announcement noted that: "All gentlemen maskers will be required to lift their masks to a committee before entering the ball room, thus insuring a respectability to the occasion which is too often wanting at masquerades."¹⁶

Shoot-outs to resolve arguments also provided occasional entertainment, reminding residents that Pullman was still a frontier town. But for organized amusement, perhaps a cockfight in 1890 vied for the most unusual. A pit was constructed in Reaney's Hall and several patrons brought game birds to the competition. The newspaper announced that three or four battles were fought. Hill Norton won one with his birds.¹⁷

In November 1888, Reaney brought in yet another diversion. He offered roller skating. "The ladies" served supper at twenty-five cents each. "Roller Skating Kids" were invited to come skate to music by the Pullman Brass Band. The entry fee was ten cents (to cover the charge of the band) plus ninety cents would rent two pairs of skates, or fifty cents for single gentlemen. Skates could be paid for by the month for an advance of three dollars. One hour each Sunday afternoon inexperienced ladies could come to skate without any gentlemen to observe them.¹⁸

As Reaney's Hall became converted into a skating rink, in November of 1890, the *Pullman Herald* of November 1890 warned that the town would soon be without a public hall, hinting that "some enterpris-

MASQUERADE!

NEW YEAR'S EVE.,

— THE —

Pullman Brass Band!

Will give a grand Masquerade Ball, in Reaney's Hall. The Band Boys will be prepared to entertain the public in first class style, and propose making this

The Event of the Season.

A cordial invitation is extended to all. Special attention will be paid to strangers and especially to guests from neighboring towns

Tickets, including supper at the Palace Hotel: \$2.50.

Spectators, admission, .50.

MUSIC BY PROF. HARRIS' COLFAX ORCHESTRA.

Reaney's Opera House
ONE NIGHT ONLY!
Tuesday, December 24th,
 McKimlass Five Peas in a Pod
Refined Minstrel Comedy Company.
 Starring the two youngest and greatest colored
 children that ever lived,
MASTER WILLIE
 The little black duke, and his sister
LITTLE ADELINA,
 The little electric battery.
 Willie, 8 years old and his sister 4 years old.
 MR. A. SALES, the funniest, wide-mouthed
 eccentric negro comedian of the day, with his
 Alabama ham foot and funny smile.
 MISS SUSAN GRIFFIN, the man voiced
 woman and only colored contralto singing three
 voices at once.
 PROF. McKANLASS, the negro Ole Bull and
 Minstrel King, the only colored graduate from
 the college of music, Cincinnati, Ohio, and the
 only man above criticism. Don't fail to see
 him.
Reserved Seats for sale at Drug Store.

ing man can make money by building a hall or opera house." After only three years of operating the hall, Reaney rented it to Staver and Walker, who took possession on April 1st, 1891.¹⁹

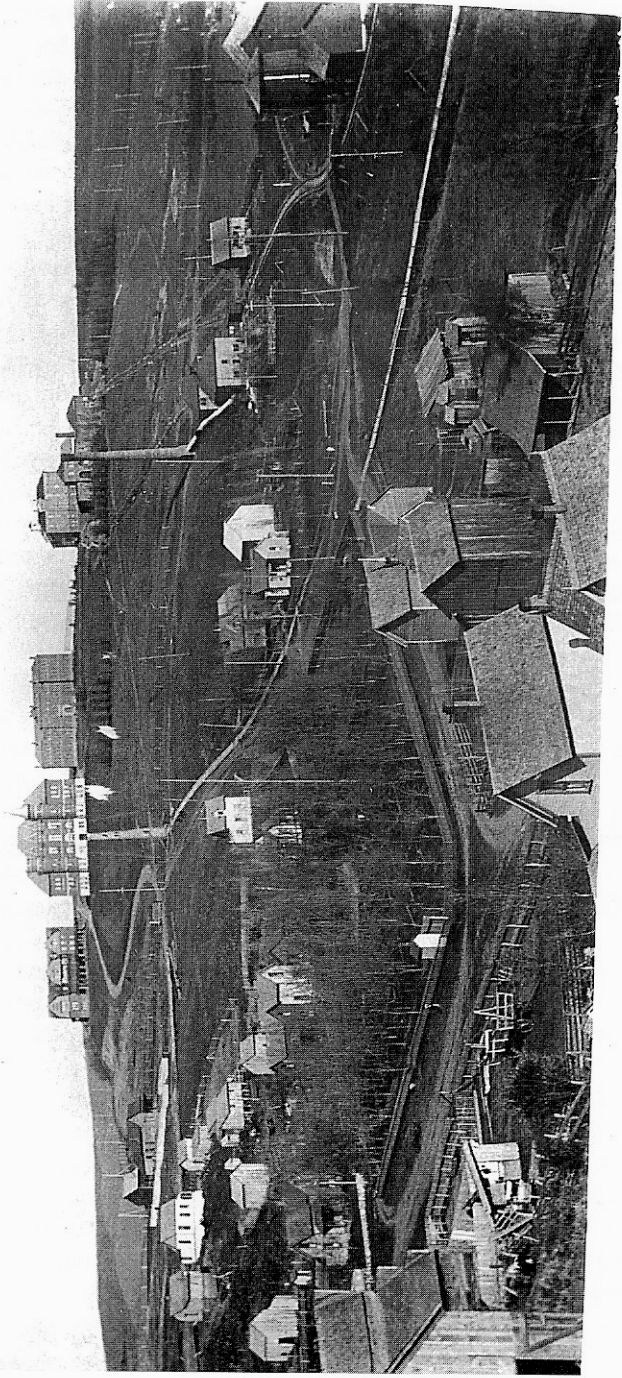
Reaney seemed to turn his attention away from cultural events to focus on improving his Reaney's First Addition to Pullman where he had lots for sale. The Whitman County 1910 Plat Book includes a large, colored map of Pullman, clearly depicting the eight blocks of this 1889 Addition – the area around the current Reaney Park. However, not entirely out of the entertainment game, he allowed a circus to set up its tents in 1891 on his property near the flour mill.

Later amusements offered in the hall included a troupe calling themselves the "Quacker Doctors" who gave nightly shows selling "Quacker Remedies." A number of comedians worked a sales pitch into their acts as they extolled the merits of various "Quacker Remedies." Their two-week run came to an abrupt halt when a lady treated by one of the "doctors" reported to her husband that the comedian had insulted her. A number of friends accompanied the husband to visit the "doctor." The *Pullman Herald* reported that

"when the consultation was over, the doctor was laid up for repairs to his head . . . anyway he was beaten about the head." As a result of this fracas, "the quackers were notified to be out of town before the night and were driven to Colfax where they took the train to parts unknown."²⁰

Reaney's prominence in town seemed, at least in part, borne out of the number of times he and his enterprises were mentioned in the newspaper. The public was informed that "Al Reaney sported a fine team of gray horses which were valued at \$400."²¹ Also, Reaney himself placed more than a few advertisements into the newspaper. For example, one advertisement in the *Pullman Herald* provided a bit of levity: "The party who owns the red heifer calf which is about 7 mos. old and has been around my haystack since August is requested to come and pay charges and take it away."²²

Yet, after leaving show business, Reaney spent most of his time focusing on improving his Addition, where he had his home, a park, and lots he wished to sell. For example, he had an artesian well bored for \$600. He planned for a private electric light plant for his Addition that would be powered by raising water from his artesian well to the top of the hill



Reaney Park (left foreground) in the early 1900's shows as a clump of young trees.

and running it down to a water wheel.²³

Yet, Reaney was not comfortable with only working on his land. Moving on to new enterprises, Reaney dredged out the brushy bottomed flat on his addition to catch the water from his well. When the water froze, he cut it into ice blocks. In December of 1890, the *Pullman Herald* reported that “he thinks he can cut nearly 300 tons this winter. He will build a mammoth ice house to store it in.” Moreover, while believing that “Ice formed in a stagnant pool or small creek is far from being pure and healthful,” the newspaper fully supported his endeavor of using Pullman’s artesian water: “This new industry will be hailed with gladness.”²⁴

After building his own “handsome residence” which he “proposed to make second to none in town,”²⁵ Reaney had his property surveyed into lots. The Plat was filed in Whitman County Records, 5 January 1889, Book A, page 184. In 1891, Reaney sold lots to T.W. Enos, manager of the Planing Mill Company, who built a “neat little residence” as well as Chris Martin, who purchased twelve acres.

Pullman’s skyline changed as townspeople purchased lots from Reaney and built on them. In 1895, for example, S. Shearer contracted to have a ten-room, two-story house built by McGilvery and Seiver. “This residence will be an elegant one,” reported the *Pullman Tribune*.²⁶

Ever the civic promoter, while also enhancing the property in Reaney’s Addition, Reaney ordered elm, pine, chestnut, and poplar trees to be planted for a park, in 1890.²⁷ This would become the first of Pullman’s parks. Later, he graded a bicycle track and opened it to the public as a “resort.” He also organized turkey, chicken, pigeon, blackbird, and glass ball shoots on Christmas Day, 1888 and New Year’s Day of 1890. He hired Tucker’s Orchestra to furnish music and George Hill to call the dances, but the gala was not well attended.²⁸

In 1904, Reaney sold the area to the city for \$2,600 and it eventually became Reaney Park. Interestingly enough, in 1902 Reaney offered the park to the city fathers for \$2,500, who declined his offer.²⁹

During the years following the Panic of 1893, Albert Reaney lost most of his property and after 1900 moved to the Okanogan area to try his hand at being a cattleman. Later, he moved to Brewster, Washington, and acquired new property. In 1907, he returned to Pullman for a visit. The *Pullman Herald* announced his brief return and reminded its readers that Reaney “formerly owned a good share of Pullman townsite, platted College Hill and laid out and planted trees in the city park. He now has a herd of 400 head of fine cattle ranging along the Columbia River.”³⁰

Two weeks after visiting Pullman, Albert Reaney died at his home in Brewster in 1910, but was buried in Pullman, as was his wife, Phoebe, who passed away in 1924.³¹ The *Pullman Herald* extolled Reaney as possibly having done “more than any other man for the upbuilding of Pullman.” The newspaper called his addition “the best residence section” in town, and his park as “one of the beauty spots of the Palouse country.” He was termed a man “whom to know was to love.” Surely, a fitting epitaph for a man who gave much to his community.³²

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Pullman Herald, 12 Sep 1924, obituary
- ² PH, 8 Apr 1910, obituary
- ³ Esther Pond Smith, *The Bunchgrass Historian*, 15:2, Summer 1987
- ⁴ PH, 12 Jan 1889
- ⁵ PH, 23 Feb 1889
- ⁶ PH, Jan 1889
- ⁷ PH, 26 Jul 1890
- ⁸ PH, 4 Nov 1938
- ⁹ PH, 22 Dec 1888
- ¹⁰ PH, 9 Nov 1889
- ¹¹ PH, 12 Jan 1889
- ¹² PH, 28 Dec 1889
- ¹³ PH, 29 Dec 1888
- ¹⁴ PH, 30 Nov 1889
- ¹⁵ PH, 22 Dec 1888
- ¹⁶ PH, 21 Dec 1889
- ¹⁷ PH, 29 Nov 1890
- ¹⁸ PH, 1 Dec 1888 and 2 Nov 1889
- ¹⁹ PH, 1 Nov 1889 and 29 Nov 1890
- ²⁰ PH, 22 Jan 1898
- ²¹ PH, 19 Apr 1890
- ²² PH, 12 Dec 1889
- ²³ PH, 12 Jul 1902 and 29 Nov 1890
- ²⁴ PH, 27 Dec 1890
- ²⁵ PH, 9 Feb 1889
- ²⁶ *Pullman Tribune*, 1895
- ²⁷ PH, 29 Mar 1890
- ²⁸ Moscow-Pullman Daily News, 11 Apr 1888, page 50; PH, 7 May 1898; and PH 9 Jun 1900
- ²⁹ PH, 12 Jul 1902 and 18 Jun 1904
- ³⁰ PH, 12 Oct 1907
- ³¹ PH, 8 Apr 1910 and 12 Sep 1924
- ³² PH, 8 Apr 1910



*Idealized representation of a Native American astride an Appaloosa.
Photo Courtesy of Appaloosa Museum and Heritage Center.*

THE ALMOTA RACE

By George B. Hatley

Soon after the discovery of gold in the Pierce area of Idaho, sternwheelers started moving supplies and miners from the Portland, Oregon area to Lewiston, Idaho. This article is one of the many stories of the interaction between the indigenous population and the newly arrived.

Many of the stops along the Snake River between Pasco and Lewiston were at alluvial fans that had for centuries been the winter headquarters of the Palouse Indian bands. One such stop was at Almota, 40 miles down river from Lewiston and 15 miles west of the present town of Colfax, Washington.

Almota became a small village for white settlers, as freight was unloaded for the newly arrived settlers taking up land on the Palouse prairies. The Almota band of the Palouse Indians wintered in the area and by mid-July would move out of the canyon to cooler camping areas on the prairies or on the edge of the mountains to the north and east. As summer progressed, the Palouse women would dig, cook and dry the winter's supply of camas bulbs, which made up the chief source of starch in the Palouse diet.

Leaving the winter quarters was always an important occasion accompanied by

celebration and horse races.

With the development of the small village of white settlers, some of which enjoyed horse racing, there developed a lively feeling of competition between the backers of the best Palouse-owned race horse and the backers of the best settler-owned race horse. Everything went well for several years until one spring the settlers were overly determined to win.

The night prior to the big race a representative of the settler group slipped into the Palouse camp, led out their prized racer, and after getting well out of the area, galloped the horse up and down the steep canyon walls most of the night and then returned the jaded, exhausted horse to the Palouse camp, unnoticed. When the Palouse saw the horse the next morning, it was no mystery what had happened. Clearly, the Palouse knew, that the horse was in no condition to race. The settler-owned horse won handily that year. The Palouse deservedly felt badly cheated and were determined to even the score.

During the following year, the Palouse located another Appaloosa that had markings almost identical to their best racer. Of course, the horses did not compare in speed. The first day of racing, the Palouse brought out their new horse, as if was their prize racer, but wagered conservatively. The horse was easily outrun, and the Palouse lost all they had wagered – but what they had wagered was not very good merchandise.

The following day was the day of the big feature race between the best racer the Palouse had against the best which the settlers could field. On that day, the Palouse bet their best possessions, and made sure it was matched by equal quality goods from the settlers. The settlers were rather confident that they were going to clean up two years in a row. When the Palouse brought out their real race horse, pretending it was the same horse that ran the day before, none of the settlers knew it was a completely different racer, because the two horses' coats were almost identical. Both horses were dark blue roans with white blankets and quarter-sized black spots. The settlers were more than merely confident – up until the race began they continued to make substantial bets.

The Palouse's horse easily won and it came as an agonizing shock to the backers of the settlers' horse. Justice had been served.

I first learned of the Almota race in 1940 from pioneer rancher and Appaloosa breeder Floyd Hickman. He advised me to check with his Uncle Elmer Hickman, whose family arrived at Almota by sternwheeler in the early 1870's. I also checked with B. J. Conover, an early-day cowboy who had ridden in the Walla Walla, Washington area and the western portion of the Palouse country. Both versions of the race were remarkably similar.



The Artesian Hotel on the SW corner of Main Street and Grand Avenue in Pullman was the scene of a brutal murder in 1893.

MURDER IN ROOM SIX

By Anna Church

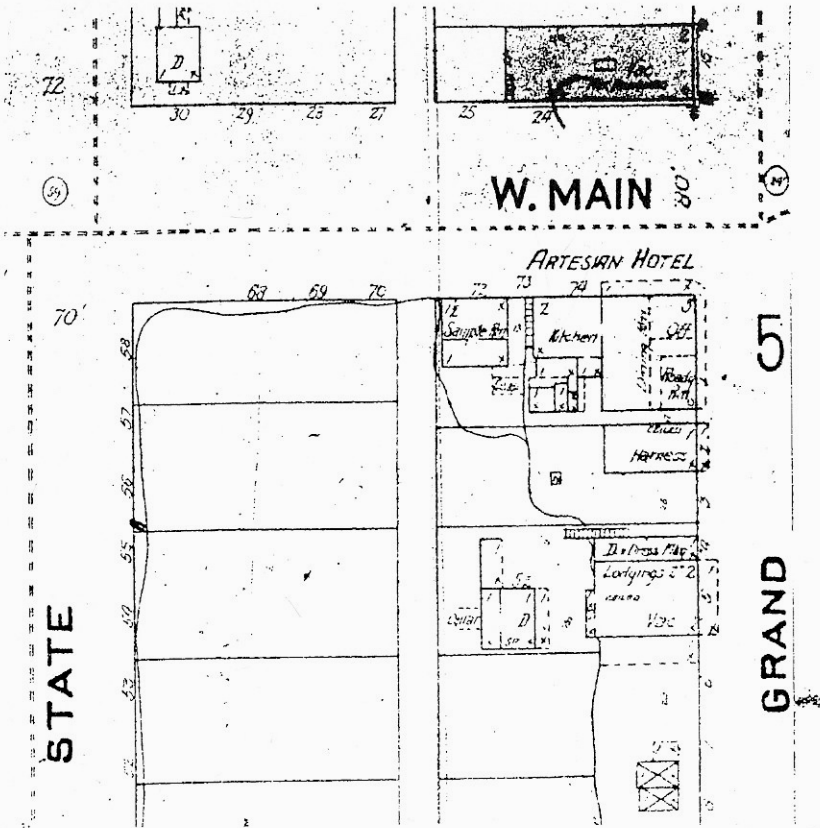
The tranquil town of Pullman, WA was awakened to the world of violence and murder in 1893. In this sleeping farming community, a prominent businessman was brutally shot in the chest during a struggle with a burglar in room 6 of the Artesian Hotel. The subsequent lynching of the suspected murderer evokes images of mythic frontier justice. The story is fascinating to the local historian since Pullman is not a city known for its vigilante justice. When thoughts of the mythic West and frontier justice come to mind, Pullman is usually not envisioned.

Our story begins at Pullman's Artesian Hotel on the morning of October 17, 1893. At around 3:00 am a man crept into Room 6 of the hotel and searched the room for money and any valuables. Two men lay asleep in their beds, as the intruder surveyed the room. Suddenly, Amos B. Cooper awoke and saw a man standing near the foot of his bed. Cooper sprang out of bed and confronted the man. As the altercation ensued, the burglar drew a gun and fired. In an instant Cooper lay dying of a gunshot wound in the chest. The murderer fled the scene of the crime unnoticed by anyone.

The entire hotel was soon awake, the foul deed discovered, and the search for the killer was on. Marshal Murray called an emergency meeting at City Hall. The Marshal called every able man to aid in the search. He organized several posses to search the town for the murderer and any kind of useful evidence. However, the posses came up empty handed.¹

The deceased, Amos B. Cooper, had just recently come to Pullman as the manager of the Blackman Bros. store. Cooper, originally from Vermont, had resided in Kansas City before moving to Pullman. The coroner stated that the gunshot entered Cooper's chest and severed one of the arteries of the heart, which caused instant death.² The funeral held for Cooper was very large and attended by the many friends he had made during his short stay in Pullman.

At the time of the murder eight different rooms were occupied. After the hotel occupants were rustled out of bed, they found that their rooms had been burglarized. Many people had watches and money stolen from their rooms. Within a few hours of the murder, many clues to the crime were found outside the hotel. The



The Artesian Hotel as shown on the March 1896 Sanborn Map of Pullman WA.

watches were recovered at the end of the alley that ran between the hotel and a harness shop; the gun, which was a 38-caliber, was found twenty-five feet from the watches and farther southwest of the harness shop.³ Later in the morning, E. L. Newell saw a package on the roof of a neighboring lodging house, the second building south of the hotel. The package, wrapped in newspaper, contained seven dollars and thirty cents, included was a Mexican dollar that belonged to Cooper.⁴ A small oilcan was found in Room 4, which was the room of George F. Parker. The can was believed to be like the ones that burglars use to oil locks they want to pick. Also found in the back alley were a pair of lock picks.

The only person in the Artesian Hotel who really heard anything prior to the shooting was a female doctor whose room was next to the parlor. She reportedly heard someone try to enter her room shortly before the murder. That person then went up the stairs and after a few minutes she heard someone come back down the stairs. Soon after that she heard a gunshot and then screaming.⁵

The man, who occupied Room 4, George F. Parker, was soon accused of the murder of Amos B. Cooper. He was first arrested and then released, but once again arrested on suspicion. The authorities felt that the things taken from the various rooms were thrown out of Room 4, those items included the gun and the key nippers. There was also supposedly blood on the counterpane of Parker's room. However, the coroner could not find any evidence that could directly connect Parker to the crime.⁶

Parker's past came into play three months after his arrest in February. It was found that Parker had had a troubled past with the law. He also had many aliases that included Joseph J. Graff, Julius Graft, Louis Hillyard and Anderson.⁷ It was found that Parker served two sentences at the Oregon Penitentiary. The first term was for larceny and the second was for obtaining money under false pretenses. Parker's picture was also recognized by authorities in Chicago as a known hotel thief.⁸

When Parker went to trial on May 21, 1894, he was officially charged with the crime of murder in the first degree.⁹ From the start of the trial it was unclear if the suspect would truly be convicted since the prosecution only seemed to have circumstantial evidence. The main evidence against Parker was the set of lock picks found with the watches and gun.

A former friend of Parker, John Knox, testified that the lock picks were the property of Parker. He stated that they were the same nippers that he had seen Parker with just a few months before the murder took place. Knox's testimony soon began to be questioned as it revealed that Knox was also an ex-convict and served quite a bit of time for burglary and larceny. Another devastating blow to the picks as concrete evidence was a contract between Knox and Sheriff Lathrum. The contract awarded Knox \$100 and paid for his mileage to and from Colfax, all in return

for his testimony that the nippers were the property of Parker.¹⁰

Even before Parker was arrested and charged, the *Pullman Herald* predicted a very eerie conclusion for whoever was guilty of the murder. The October 20, 1893, the *Herald* stated:

*“If the dastardly assassin could be caught the people of Pullman would make short work of him, and would hang him up to one of the numerous telegraph poles that adorn our city, as a warning to others. We do not believe in Lynch law, but this is one of those cases where the majesty of the law is too slow to satisfy the public, and such men should be taught the lesson that murder is the greatest sin that can be committed, and that death alone can pay the penalty.”*¹¹

This prediction was all too true. In June, a mob lynched George F. Parker outside the Colfax Courthouse before his trial had concluded.¹²

On June 2, 1894, jailer B.F. Newcomer awoke to a knock on the door at the Whitman County Courthouse in Colfax. Newcomer asked who was there and was answered by a man who said he had a prisoner from Palouse to put in jail. Newcomer, thinking the voice was that of a marshal, opened the door. Abruptly, Newcomer was threatened at gunpoint by a masked and seriously armed mob. The mob forced the jailer to get the keys for the jail and opened the cell of Parker.



Whitman County Courthouse, Colfax WA. Lynch victims Parker and Hill were hung from the balcony above the entrance (right, under tower), June 2, 1894.

As the mob took Parker out of his cell he never said a word to stop them. Along with Parker, another prisoner was taken, Ed Hill, who was serving time for assault and battery. Parker and Hill were then taken above the entrance of the courthouse, tied to the railing of the balcony, secured with nooses, and thrown over the edge. Hill died of a broken neck whereas Parker was killed by strangulation.¹³

After the lynching the *Pullman Herald* once again commented on the event. This time their response was of a different opinion. The *Herald* stated:

*“The deed of last Friday night is to be most deeply deplored; not only is the deed deplorable, but also the causes which led up to the deed. But however great may have been the aggravation, it cannot be so construed as to make the lynching justifiable. The people are never justified, under any circumstances, in taking such desperate measures as that of lynching.”*¹⁴

This shows how the *Herald* condemned the acts of the angry mob even though in the past they had said that if the murderer were caught, lynching would be justified.

The lynching of George F. Parker was a total disregard of the judicial process in Whitman County. The court could not conclude that Parker was truly the one responsible for the death of Amos B. Cooper on October 17, 1893. The lynching marked a time in recorded Whitman County history when people took the law into their own hands. The lynching occurred so quickly and without real thought, the act was an emotional response of predisposed violent men. The lynching brought a small community into the mythic west and demonstrated the wrath of frontier justice. The articles of the *Pullman Herald* exemplified the beliefs that during the 1800's, the American west was a place where heroic men and groups decided the fate of criminals. The events that unfolded in Pullman in 1893 and 1894 are in no way heroic, but they do deserve a place in the stories of frontier justice.

¹ “Murder Most Foul.” *Pullman Herald*, 20 October 1893, p. 1.

² “He is on Trial for His Life.” *Colfax Gazette*, 25 May 1894, p. 1.

³ “A Murder Mystery.” *Colfax Gazette*, 20 October 1893, p. 1.

⁴ “Murder Most Foul.” *Pullman Herald*, 20 October 1893, p. 1.

⁵ “A Murder Mystery.” *Colfax Gazette*, 20 October 1893, p. 1.

⁶ “Mysterious Parker.” *Colfax Gazette*, 27 October 1893, p. 1.

⁷ “Against Parker.” *Pullman Herald*, 16 February 1894, p. 1.

⁸ W. H. Lever, *An Illustrated History of Whitman County, State of Washington* (1901), 124.

⁹ “At the Court House.” *Colfax Gazette*, 24 November 1893, p. 1.

¹⁰ “Those Nippers.” *Pullman Herald*, 1 June 1894, p. 1.

¹¹ “Murder Most Foul.” *Pullman Herald*, 20 October 1893, p. 1.

¹² Edith Erickson, *Colfax: 100 Plus* (1981), 11.

¹³ “How it was Done.” *Pullman Herald*, 8 June 1894, p. 1.

¹⁴ “How it was Done.” *Pullman Herald*, 8 June 1894, p. 1.



THE WSC STUDENT STRIKE OF 1936

By Robert Luedeking

The student strike at Washington State College in May 1936 differed from most campus disturbances before and since. First, it was well organized! It also had the support of an overwhelming majority of the students. It was non-violent. And finally, in the end, the students were victorious.

It all started in late April, 1936, when Dr. Ernest O. Holland, president of the college, told a group of students that they must always be prepared to take charge of their own lives. Afterwards, a few sophomores were discussing this point, when one of them exclaimed that maybe they should “do something about Dean Annie and her stupid rules”. (Dean Annie was Mrs. Annie M. Fertig, Dean of Women, who was viewed as a tyrant by many students.) This article tells the story of how from this simple beginning the protest mushroomed in less than one week into a full-fledged strike which received state-wide attention. It is based on newspaper accounts of the time and on histories of Washington State University by Stimson¹, Landeen², and Frykman³. The students who participated in these events were born during Woodrow Wilson’s administration and shaped by the hard times of the depression. It is interesting to note just how much they differed from today’s college students in some respects, but not in others.

Plans for a protest were developed over the next two days (Thursday and Friday, April 30 and May 1) in a series of quickly arranged meetings. Initially, these were mostly in the fraternities and sororities, but by the weekend the preparations were campus-wide and included the dormitory and off-campus residence leaders. Artists painted signs. Several well-qualified students were dispatched to Spokane and Seattle to augment the information going to newspapers and radio. To assure peace during the strike, lettermen (football players and other athletes) were to patrol the taverns in town to see that no college students used the movement as an opportunity to drink to excess.

In an interview by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, WSC senior Mimi Frank complained that “We were treated like children” in justifying the strike. But more than antiquated social rules and their arbitrary enforcement seemed to be behind the widespread student dissatisfaction. The rules were not published, and this led some students to suspect that Dean Annie often made up rules on the spot to cover situations she found unacceptable or inappropriate. Even more than the “rules”, it was Dean Annie’s manner that made her so unpopular. As Stimson explains, “President Holland and many a housemother managed to enforce rules while transmitting a sense of affection for young people.” Students also complained about other rules such as the ones for compulsory class attendance and the stiff penalties for skipping



Parade of WSC student strikers ends at the Administration Building (now Thompson Hall), May 5, 1936. Stevens Hall can be seen at the right.

classes. Moreover, many faculty members resented the authoritarian nature of Holland's administration and thus were inclined to be sympathetic to the students' cause.

On Monday May 4th a student delegation delivered to President Holland the list of eight demands drawn up by the Students' Liberty Association (S.L.A.). It was headed by one-inch letters proclaiming "WE DEMAND" and included such items as publication of college and social rules, later curfew hours, and "abolition of Dean Annie's suggestive picnic and social rulings". The students also told the president that there would be a protest parade. Holland did not object to the parade because it would be held fourth period and would not interfere with classes. As to the demands themselves, he stated that "any changes must be a result of a friendly, frank discussion between college authorities and the students themselves." This led some students to believe that the demands would not receive serious consideration.

The next morning, at 11:15, led by a 75-piece volunteer band, the students marched past the bookstore and Stevens and McCroskey Halls playing and singing the Cougar's fight song, "Fight, fight, fight for Washington State". Some students carried signs that ranged from "This may be a cow-college but we're not contented" to "Mama says Yes". The latter was in response to President Holland's suggestion Monday evening that students should talk with their parents before deciding to skip classes and join the strike. A few carried more politically inspired signs of the times such as "Hitler/Germany = Holland/WSC".

The parade ended in front of the administration building (now Thompson Hall). Despite it being a blustery rainy day, the crowd that assembled there was large. It was variously estimated at 3,000 to 3,500, the latter number approaching WSC's total enrollment that term. Then, as the campus newspaper, the *Evergreen*, reported "To show their sincerity in the movement and their total lack of radicalism, the band played 'The Star Spangled Banner,' with the 3000 paraders and on-lookers standing rigidly at attention, with right hand[s] over their hearts." After some speeches and cheers, the student delegation led by Robert Yothers and Jerry Sage entered the building and met with Dr. Holland for the next three hours.

The conclusion of the meeting was signaled by a blast from the campus steam plant's whistle, and students were soon swarming into Bohler gym to hear the results. Sage reported that while President Holland was prepared to meet the demands, some of them would require approval by the faculty senate. Some students regarded this as "the old Holland stall" and favored striking the next day, but the majority finally voted to postpone the strike for one day to give the faculty time to act.

Barbara Jean Collins of Pullman was a senior in high school when she joined that crowd in Bohler Gym. Sixty-four years later, she recalls being particularly impressed with how well organized the students were, and by the speakers,



Students crowded into Bohler Gym listening as the strike leaders report on their meeting with President Holland.

who were very articulate and effective. Despite the high level of excitement, it was not a bit disorderly.

The student unrest and strike threat had attracted state-wide attention. Newspaper editors pontificated about “flaming youth”. Regents and legislators communicated their views and advice. A telegram from Regent C. W. Orton especially rankled the students. It said in part

Suggest you boys keep your shirts on and don't take your problems too seriously. Press reports lead me to believe that you are making mountains out of molehills... Remember that while the college is being operated for the benefit of the students it belongs to the citizens of the state and if the students don't like the way it is run it is their privilege to leave....

Wednesday May 6 was another day filled with meetings, but nothing seemed to be resolved. That evening the students again packed into Bohler Gym. This time, however, they voted against further delay. The strike would begin the next morning.

Late that night Holland made one last effort to avert the strike by inviting Yothers to the president's mansion. Yothers told Holland that a promise was not sufficient for the students; their demands must be signed. Holland, haggard and seemingly humiliated, sat at his desk and signed.

It was, however, much too late to hold another meeting to stop the next morning's strike. At 7:00 a.m. pickets were posted around all classroom buildings. A few foreign and graduate students received special passes, but few if any other students crossed the picket lines. [Large headlines in the *Seattle Times* proclaimed "ONLY 10 GIRL STUDENTS GO TO CLASSES AT PULLMAN". Holland, disappointed that the strike was continuing despite his signing, toured the campus later that morning and observed how completely the college had been shut down. He sent for Ed Goldsworthy, student body president, and asked him for his help.

Goldsworthy had distanced himself from the strike as did Larry Giles, editor of the *Evergreen*. The two were personal friends of Dr. Holland. While they agreed with the striker's complaints, they also believed that a strike would not help the students and would inevitably inflict great hurt on Holland. Goldsworthy then conferred with the strike leaders who agreed to call a "truce" for the purpose of taking another vote.

Hundreds of students soon crowded into Bryan Hall. Yothers and Goldsworthy were joined on stage by Joseph Knott, professor of agriculture. They argued that the students had won and the strike should stop. Sage and others disagreed, but finally, a motion was passed that the strike be suspended until the faculty could act. The faculty committee then met at 4:30 and quickly ratified the concessions that Holland had made to the students.

The strikers again packed into Bohler that night. When President Holland entered the gym with Professor Knott and Bob Yothers, they "jumped to their feet and roared their approval". The strike was over! An exuberant crowd noisily celebrated the victory.

What were the results of the strike of 1936? First, Dean Annie Fertig and Dean of Men Carl Morrow resigned immediately afterwards. (Many students, however, felt that Dean Morrow was a sacrificial lamb.) A student-faculty committee was formed to adjust curfew hours, to provide fairer hearings for students accused of infractions, and to publish the rules governing social life on campus. The committee also ended the "draconian rule which took a full semester credit away from any student who missed even one class on the first day of school after a vacation." In addition, students were now permitted to have radios in their dormitory rooms.

President Holland was deeply hurt by the strike. According to William M. Landeen in his book *E. O. Holland and the State College*,

There are those who insist that the strike left ugly scars on the president's memory, that it even damaged his health, and that

he never again was the same man. They say that his great faith in the students of WSC, who had always had easy access to his office, whose problems he often knew as intimately as he did the names of thousands of them, and whose welfare he really had very much at heart, was irreparably shaken by this fracas.

Others saw no long term effect on Holland.

An interesting sidelight to the strike was that the measures taken by the strike committee to ensure that the strike would not be marred by alcohol induced incidents were effective. Bob Yothers reported in the *Evergreen* that he “had a statement from Gentry’s that not one glass of beer was sold to college students while the movement was on, and that the other beer parlors in town reported the biggest milk shake trade in the history of the town.”

One final note. It has been claimed that there was one promise that Holland did not keep. On the day before the 1936 commencement, he telephoned Robert Yothers to tell him that he would not be receiving a diploma. This made little practical difference to Yothers since he had already been admitted to law school. In 1956, after Yothers had become a prominent attorney and active in state politics, he was finally awarded his bachelor’s degree by WSC.

NOTE: All photos used in this article are courtesy of Washington State University Library Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections (MASC).

¹ Stimson, William L. *Going to Washington State: A Century of Student Life*, Washington State University Press, 1990.

² Landeen, William M. *E. O. Holland and the State College of Washington*, State College of Washington, 1950

³ Frykman, George A. *Creating the People’s University — Washington State University, 1890-1990*, Washington State University Press, 1990

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