

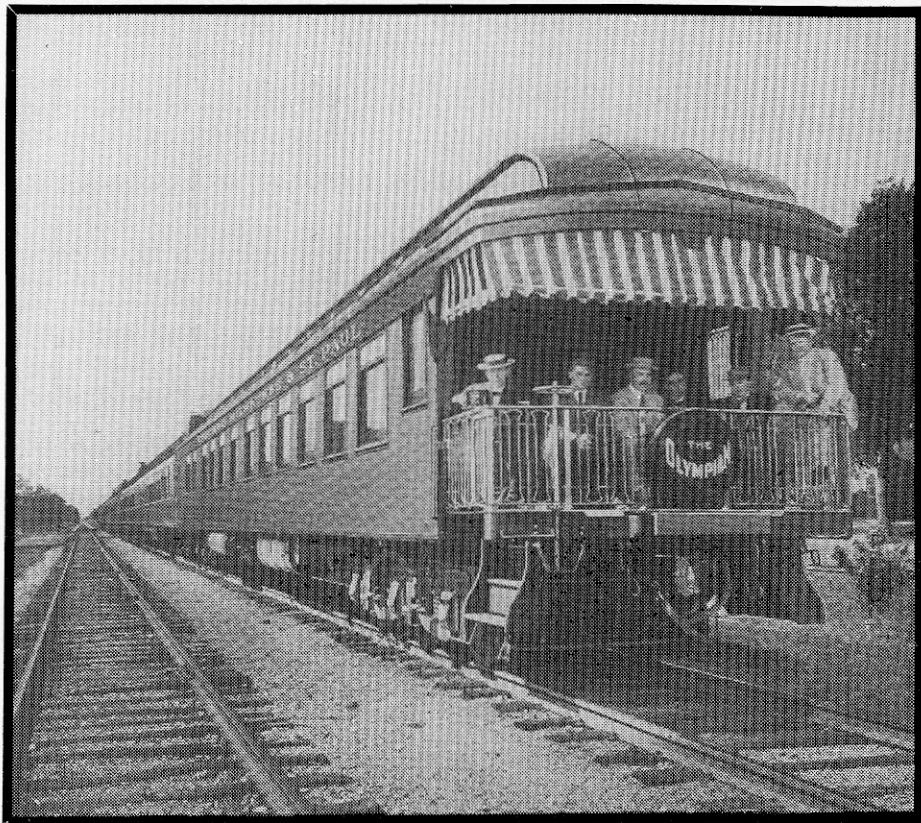
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TWO RAILROAD TOWNS

Tekoa and Malden

Part II

Also
Reminiscences of Elberton

Two Railroad Towns: Tekoa and Malden

by

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Part II

Tekoa and Malden During the Era of Railroad Decline, Late 1910, to the Early 1980s

Tekoa, Malden, and many other division points experienced a decline and eventual loss of railroad employment in the sixty years following World War I. Competition from other means of transportation gradually reduced the role of railways in commerce while technological changes, especially in motive power, centralized activities within the industry. Although Tekoa survived as an agricultural market town on a branch rail line, Malden shrank to a small residential community without business sector or railroad.

The major cause of the national decline of railroads from the late 1910s into the 1970s was the convenience and popularity of motor vehicles. During the 1920s the *Tekoa Blade* frequently mentioned townspeople and local farmers who purchased cars and trucks and made long auto journeys. Even railroad people used trains less. For example, when the wives of Milwaukee Road conductors in Malden went to Spokane in November, 1922, for a day at the theater and dinner they traveled by car. Yet the full impact of motor vehicles on railway business was not readily apparent for decades and this competition ultimately did less to cut employment than did technical advances within railroading.¹

A problem which had a more immediate impact on Tekoa was the conflict between labor and management. In 1919 and 1922 there were two nationwide strikes by railroad shopworkers. Railway wages had nearly doubled under government wartime operation, but not always as fast as the workers wanted. On 6 August, 1919 all twenty Tekoa shopmen joined others across the United States and walked off their jobs, demanding higher pay from the federal railway administration. The fifteen carmen struck two days later, but returned to work by 12 August. Almost all train service continued through the strike, which ended in Tekoa on 14 August when the shopworkers returned to their positions. The strike concluded without wage gains, but also without violence or loss of jobs in Tekoa.²

Another labor dispute three years later had much more disruptive consequences. After restoration of private railway operations in 1920, corporate leaders resented the high labor costs they inherited from government managers. When the federal Railroad

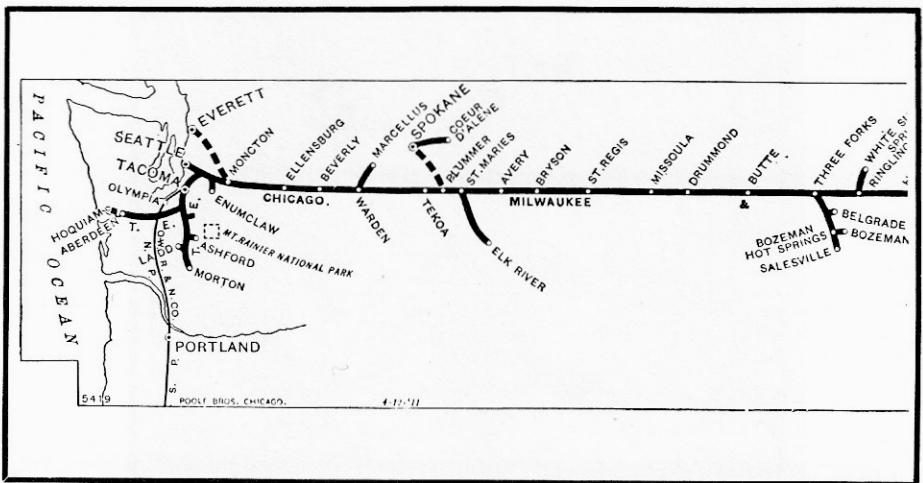
Labor Board approved industry-wide cuts in wages and rights for shopworkers, four hundred thousand members of the Federal Shop Craft unions, including all thirty-four shop and car department employees in Tekoa, struck in protest on 1 July, 1922. The Union Pacific responded by placing five "deputy sheriffs" at the idle shops for "fire protection" and set a deadline for returning to work by 8 July, after which the strikers would lose pension and seniority rights. The eighth passed without either side relenting and the Union Pacific began recruiting new workers at reduced wages. During the third week twelve more locomotive terminal employees joined the walkout. Although about twenty strikebreakers had crossed picket lines, there were no major disturbances. The dispute lingered through August and ended after U.S. Attorney General Harry Daugherty issued an injunction on 1 September which prohibited picketing and other union strike activities.³

Many Tekoa railroaders lost their jobs to other townspeople and outsiders brought in by the Union Pacific. Strikers who regained their positions forfeited seniority and pension rights. After one month of the strike the Methodist minister, the Reverend M. H. Marvin, invited railwaymen to a special sermon discussing the human aspects of the dispute. Antagonism in town among strikers, "scabs," and families and friends of both groups endured beyond the resolution of the strike. Among the new work force the Union Pacific organized its own company union to insure stable future labor relations.⁴

A new railroad entered the Tekoa area in the 1920s when the McGoldrick Lumber Company constructed a seventeen-mile railway to carry logs from the white pine region near Sanders, Idaho down Hangman Creek to the state line just south of Tekoa, where it connected with a Union Pacific spur. Grading of the line began in April, 1925, with the Hotel Tekoa serving as temporary headquarters. Some local men worked on the construction crews, which finished laying most of the rail by the end of the year. The first train came out of the woods in April, 1926. McGoldrick trains ran to the state line where Union Pacific crews took over and forwarded the logs to the company's sawmill in Spokane. While McGoldrick employed mostly Idaho men on its railroad, it temporarily benefited the local economy during construction and afterwards provided new business for the Union Pacific. The railway operated until the end of the 1930s, when trucks replaced steam locomotives and log cars.⁵

Motor vehicles also cut into railroad passenger business as autos and busses reduced patronage on local rail schedules, which in 1924 still consisted of eight Union Pacific and two Milwaukee daily trains serving Tekoa. By 1925 the Union Pacific wanted to end the unprofitable Pleasant Valley rail car operation, although it did not receive government permission to do so until the early 1930s. The railway even competed with itself, forming its own bus line subsidiary in the late 1920s. Union Pacific Stages ran daily busses on roads parallel to its rail routes, including schedules between Pendleton and Spokane through Tekoa. In May, 1930, the Milwaukee Road ended passenger service through Tekoa and Malden when the rail car operating between St. Maries and Marengo ceased its tri-weekly run. During most of the 1930s four daily Union Pacific passenger trains (the Pendleton-Spokane locals and the Wallace branch run) stopped in Tekoa.⁶

Despite the gradual decline and disruption of the early 1920s, the Union Pacific work force in Tekoa did not decrease greatly. When the government returned the



Western route of the Olympian, 1911 advertisement

railways to private operation in 1920, nationwide rail employment was at a record high of two million (two out of every 104 Americans), with over two hundred of them in Tekoa (two out of every fifteen townspeople). Work continued for train crews and track laborers and in the roundhouse, shops, and station offices. In 1925 the Union Pacific payroll of \$35,000 still includes over two hundred employees.⁷

Malden, in contrast, suffered substantial reductions in railroad employment and total population in the early 1920s when the Milwaukee Road closed maintenance and repair facilities for rolling stock. Improvements in steam locomotives, especially in heavy mainline power, resulted in longer runs between servicing stops and eliminated the need for some roundhouses and shops along the trunk routes. By 1920 new electric engines displaced from mountain work older articulated steam locomotives (two sets of cylinders and driving wheels hinged under the rigid boiler), which the Milwaukee Road rebuilt and assigned to the non-electrified mainline between Othello and Avery, Idaho. These large engines pulled freight trains through Malden without need of roundhouse attention, stopping only to change crews. Once mainline freights passed through the town without changing locomotives, work for the roundhouse and shops almost disappeared. Car repair activities followed engine servicing to the division points of Othello and Avery. By the mid-1920s the Milwaukee Road had closed all the maintenance facilities in Malden. The railroaders remaining were mostly train crews with a few station staff and track workers.⁸

The sudden reduction of railroad work in Malden caused the town to shrink rapidly. Between the 1920 and 1930 census the population fell from 1,005 to 375, from the fifth largest town in Whitman County to the eleventh. School enrollment dropped from 273 students in 1922 to 202 two years later. The weekly newspaper, the *Malden*



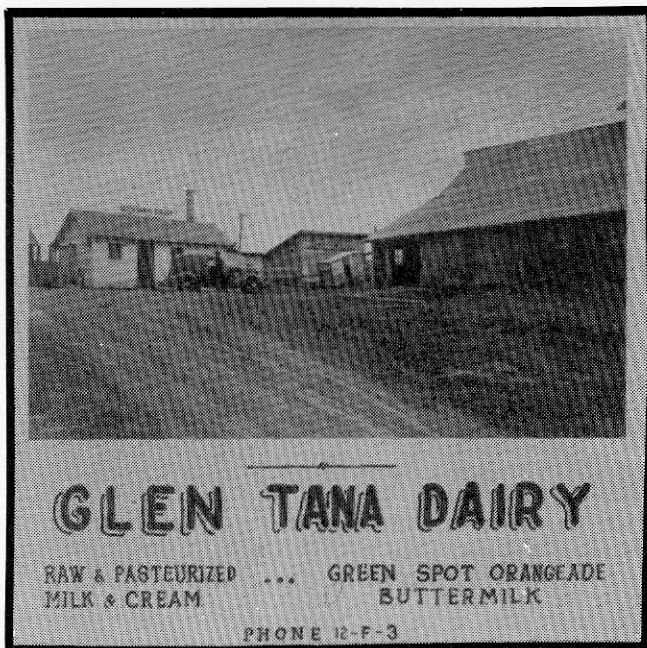
Tekoa, 1938

Register, went out of business in 1923 after fourteen years of publication. Even some of those people who stayed in Malden contributed to its decline, for just before it closed the *Register* complained that too many residents drove out of town (probably to Rosalia) for shopping. The railway's action left much of the town empty, causing an observer to note that "good buildings for sale at 10% of their cost testify to the uncertainty of railroad favor." From the late 1920s into the early 1970s Malden's population declined gradually while it continued to serve as a crew-change point.⁹

In January, 1930 the Union Pacific laid off workers as part of the annual winter reduction of activities. Due to the onset of the Depression, many towns on the railway suffered greater cuts than in previous winters, but only four Tekoa railroaders in the mechanical, stores, and clerk departments lost their jobs. As rail traffic had not yet dropped significantly, the extra board of train crewmen remained intact.¹⁰

Larger layoffs followed as the Depression worsened. In December, 1930, ten roundhouse, machine shop, and car repair workers (about one-third of the maintenance force) lost their jobs. Those with many years of Union Pacific employment could try to "bump in" (take over a position from an employee with less seniority) at another company facility. As fewer trains operated, calls for crewmen on the extra board came less frequently. The layoffs of some employees meant a wider range of work for those that remained. For instance, the night foreman at the roundhouse performed tasks previously done by the hostler in preparing locomotives for service and car inspectors had to do some of the work usually handled by repairers.¹¹

Many Tekoa railroaders spent several years away from their regular jobs, occasionally returning when bad weather strained railway operations. The burden of running trains and maintaining equipment and track during heavy snow in February, 1932



Tekoa, 1938

and flooding in January, 1934, provided temporary employment for jobless townspeople. Others sought income outside railroading. Joseph Twyman, a conductor, worked during part of the 1930s helping build logging roads in Idaho and picking fruit near Wenatchee. Brakeman A. McArthur grew tired of frequent layoffs from the extra board and decided to try farming near Creston, west of Spokane, in March, 1932.¹²

By 1932 and 1933 the period of severe rail traffic and employment decline ended, followed by gradual growth of business and a mixture of renewed hiring and more layoffs. The Union Pacific halted operation of the yard engine in Tekoa in December 1932, costing the five-man switch crew their jobs, but restored locomotive and men to work four months later. Al Peterson got a position as a car repairer in 1932, which he held for two years. After losing this job he worked in grain elevators and at farming until recalled by the railroad at the end of the decade. Another winter emergency in 1937 temporarily increased the Union Pacific payroll. A freight train left Tekoa for Spokane in February with three locomotives and crews (fifteen men) to pull it through a blizzard. Snow stalled the train at Rahm, eight miles north of Tekoa, trapping the men there for seventy hours. A rotary snowplow (transferred from its Oregon base), assisted by section crews from the area and Tekoa townspeople hired to shovel snow, rescued the train and crews. Within several years members of this temporary snow-fighting force found permanent employment with the Union Pacific as war-related business increased railway traffic.¹³

As the 1930s ended the war in Europe helped pull the American railroads out of the decade-long depression. After United States entry into World War II in 1941, the railways annually carried greater freight and passenger loads than during World War I. In spite of strained resources and labor shortages, especially after years of reduced activity, the companies avoided another government takeover.¹⁴

War preparations in Tekoa during the first month after the attack on Pearl Harbor included the railroads. Anticipating the possibility of an air raid, two minutes of short blasts of a locomotive whistle (at the roundhouse or in the switchyard) was chosen as the signal for blacking out all lights, with one long blast meaning "all clear." Concerned about sabotage, the Milwaukee Road put two guards on its trestle. Responding to patriotic fervor, Union Pacific employees in Tekoa by the end of December, 1941 had purchased twenty thousand dollars of Defense Bonds through paycheck deductions.¹⁵

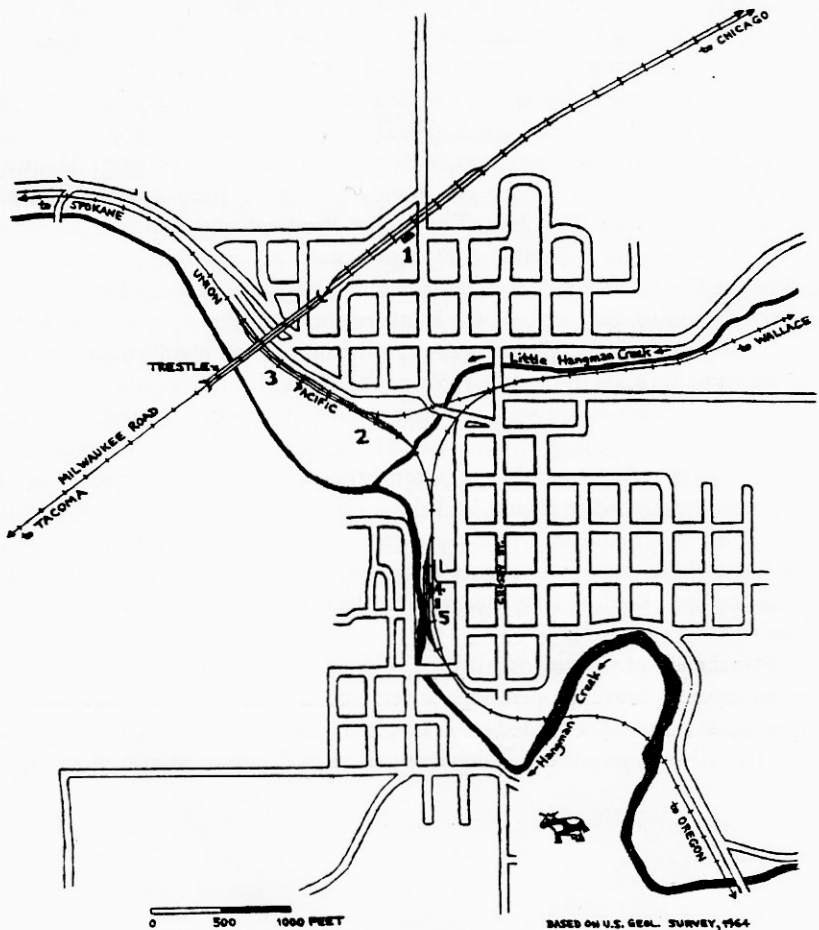
Railroad employment in Tekoa grew steadily for the first time in over twenty years as train traffic increased. As military requirements and highpaying jobs in defense plants took some railwaymen away from Tekoa, women took over jobs as clerks and telegraphers in the station and also cleaned locomotives and freight cars. Railroaders often worked extra hours, earning much overtime pay.¹⁶

The Union Pacific payroll stimulated Tekoa businesses during the war. After two decades of population decline, a housing shortage developed. Townspeople rented out spare rooms and primitive outbuildings to new residents. Although the community had three hotels in the 1910s, only the Hotel Tekoa remained open in the 1940s. Tenants and crewmen from other towns sleeping between train assignments filled its rooms day and night. Entertainment was easier to find as five places in Tekoa served beer, and slot machines on the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation attracted railroaders.¹⁷

After the war the decline of railway towns resumed as road transportation continued to cut into rail traffic and as diesel locomotives replaced steam power. The diesels, which would soon reduce the role of Tekoa and many other division points, had first appeared before the war. Several hundred Tekoa people gathered along the track at 8:15 a.m. on a Sunday in April, 1934, to watch Union Pacific's experimental streamlined passenger train travel through town on a publicity tour after being displayed in Spokane. In November, 1941, the Milwaukee Road, one of the first railroads in the nation to use the new power in freight service, began daily diesel operation between Avery and Othello through Tekoa and Malden. On the first train one crew ran the new four-unit locomotive pulling eighty-eight cars, previously the work of two steam engines and two crews.¹⁸

Although more expensive than steam locomotives, diesels operated with greater efficiency and convenience, used fuel cheaper than coal in the late 1940s, and eliminated the necessity of fuel and water stops between terminals. Furthermore, diesels could operate for weeks with little mechanical attention, needing only about one-quarter the maintenance time of steam, and consequently requiring fewer engine houses. In many towns this resulted in the closure of facilities and the layoff of work forces. During the decade after the war the Union Pacific centralized diesel work at the East Spokane shops and a new terminal at Hinkle, Oregon and shut down roundhouses on secondary lines at Walla Walla, Yakima, Moscow, Wallace, and Tekoa.¹⁹

Diesel and steam locomotives mixed at the Tekoa roundhouse and yards at the beginning of the 1950s, the decade which ended the domination of the town's economy by the railroad. By 1960 the Union Pacific had closed the roundhouse and shops, rerouted branch line service to Wallace so it bypassed Tekoa, and moved the train crews to Spokane. The Union Pacific began discharging and transferring mechanical department employees when the first diesel locomotives in regular service appeared in Tekoa in 1948. The last years of roundhouse operations, in the early 1950s, involved a



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consisted of three residential sections on hills and flats in between. After 1909 the north hill included agricultural and railway structures along the Milwaukee Road, such as its depot (1). The business district was on the southeast hill, centered on Crosby Street. The flats contained agricultural and other trackside enterprises and the Union Pacific properties: the locomotive terminal (2), the car repair area (3), the passenger station and offices (4), and the freight depot (5).

small group of workers engaged in minimal maintenance and inspection duties. The car repair track was abandoned as the company centralized this activity at the new diesel terminals. By the mid-1950s Union Pacific's industrial facilities on the flats next to Hangman Creek, for over sixty years a major feature of Tekoa's townscape and economy, were vacant and destined for razing. The last regular steam run (the passenger schedule between Spokane and Wallace) stopped in Tekoa only for riders, mail, and express, passing the roundhouse without changing locomotives.²⁰

Even this ended when Tekoa lost its role as a rail junction and freight switchyard for Union Pacific traffic to northern Idaho. In 1955 the company rerouted its Coeur d'Alene Valley branch line trains over Milwaukee Road tracks between Manito and Plummer, bypassing Tekoa, which cut twenty-four miles from a one-way trip and avoided steep grades over Watt Hill. The Union Pacific dismantled its track between Tilma, two miles east of Tekoa, and Plummer, and rail passenger service to Tekoa ended. For the Union Pacific Tekoa remained as a station on a secondary line, served by just two scheduled daily drains, the local freights between Ayer and Spokane.²¹

The final phase of the railroad withdrawal from Tekoa involved the transfer of train crewmen to Spokane in the late 1950s as the Union Pacific consolidated activities in that city. After negotiations with the appropriate labor organizations, the company moved the extra board listings for engineers (1955), conductors (1957), and brakemen and firemen (1958). At first only the administrative activities occurred in Spokane while the crews continued to change in Tekoa. The railroad, however, soon persuaded the Tekoa men to "deadhead" (ride trains free) or drive themselves to Spokane and begin and end their train assignments there. By the end of the 1950s about thirty railroaders and their families have moved to Spokane with the company assisting in the relocation.²²

By 1960 the era of railway domination of Tekoa's economy was over. The trains that passed through town stopped only to serve certain agricultural businesses. Only about one dozen railroaders resided in Tekoa, including train crewmen working out of Spokane. Its railway age ended, Tekoa continued to function as a local market and agricultural services center.²³

The decline of railroad employment from the end of World War II to the late 1950s caused a large decrease in the population of Tekoa. Although eight of the dozen largest communities in Whitman County lost population after the war, Tekoa suffered a drop greater in number and percentage than any other town. With 1,383 residents in 1940, 1,189 ten years later, and just 911 in 1960, Tekoa lost a little over one-third of its people.²⁴

Loss of the Union Pacific payroll, which had helped support Tekoa's merchants for over sixty years, resulted in several major business closures after World War II. Two nationwide firms closed outlets in town: J.C. Penney in 1951 and Safeway two years later. Tekoa's only remaining theater ended operations in 1958. The variety of bars and restaurants largely supported by local railroaders and train crewmen from other towns spending time between assignments dwindled. When the train crew change point moved to Spokane the Hotel Tekoa lost its major source of income. As a farming community Tekoa continued to offer a wide range of stores and services, but the diversity and vitality created by industrial income disappeared.²⁵

After 1960 the railroad activity in Tekoa was typical of that in most farming towns. After decades of the diminishing role of railways in commerce the need for full-

time agencies in most communities disappeared. The companies demolished stations and consolidated duties under fewer agents, who worked in the remaining depots or traveled by automobile to meet shippers and to look after affairs in the towns they served. The Milwaukee Road closed its station at Tekoa in May, 1960. Efforts to preserve it as a city museum failed and it was razed. The Union Pacific depot served as a freight agency until its closure in January, 1969. The company moved into an office in the business district and in 1970 dismantled the old structure.²⁶

Tekoa continues to have a small role in the Union Pacific system into the 1980s. Six weekly scheduled local freights between Spokane and Moscow and occasional extras pass through town, sometimes stopping to serve grain and agricultural chemical firms. The three men of the section crew are the only railroaders left in Tekoa. From a supply base on the site of the depot they patrol and maintain several dozen miles of track. The switchyard functions as storage for freight cars.²⁷

Physical remnants of Tekoa's railroading past are scarce. The freight station survives in poor condition as a farm supply store. In the northwest part of town grass and brush cover the ruins of the roundhouse and machine shop. Just to the east concrete pads for the vanished water tank sit on ground black with coal dust and cinders, rare reminders of the steam locomotives that made Tekoa an industrial town.²⁸

The railway presence in Malden persisted later than in Tekoa but corporate weakness and failure made the end more drastic. The Milwaukee Road never was a strong transcontinental railroad. Built late in the era of railway expansion, much of its route passed through country which contributed little revenue, and for hundreds of miles it paralleled the older Northern Pacific. Two periods of receivership, from 1925 to 1927 and from 1935 to 1945, occurred without major changes in rail service. The



Tekoa, 1938



Tekoa, 1938

1970s saw the decline of Milwaukee operations through Tekoa and Malden. In 1970 its two competitors between Minnesota and Puget Sound (Northern Pacific and Great Northern, both older and stronger) merged into the Burlington Northern. Milwaukee headquarters in Chicago cut maintenance and service on its western lines, preferring to concentrate company resources on its Midwestern properties. Traffic on the transcontinental line in Washington declined from two or three daily freight trains each way in the early 1970s to just one per day in each direction in 1979.²⁹

Major railroad employment in Malden came to an end in 1974 when the Milwaukee Road changed crew assignments as a late adaption to diesel locomotives. Train and engine service runs based on steam power became obsolete as the greater operating efficiency of diesels speeded up train movements. For a couple of decades fear of job losses had made unions resist change, but they eventually negotiated with the railroads, which wanted to cut labor costs by lengthening road assignments, hence reducing the number of crews required to move a train between major terminals.³⁰

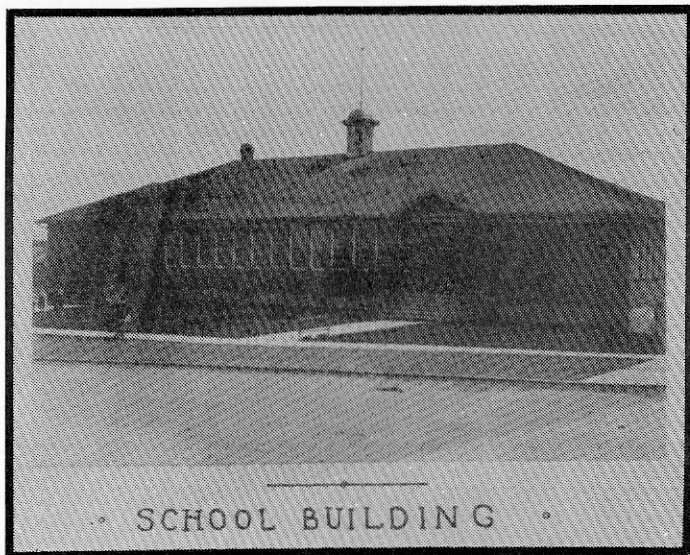
On 1 November, 1974 the Milwaukee Road eliminated Malden as the home based for men operating east of Avery (108 miles) or west to Othello (94 miles) and established a new terminal at St. Maries, 64 miles to the east. From here crews worked east to Alberton, Montana (144 miles) or west to Othello (158 miles). The change affected about fifty-five crewmen at Malden. Some moved, with company assistance in selling houses and relocating, to St. Maries. A few transferred to Alberton or Spokane. Others chose to keep their homes in Malden and commute between there and St. Maries. Three years later corporate failure threatened this new arrangement.³¹

After bankruptcy in late 1977 the Milwaukee Road wanted to cut drastically track mileage and rail service, including all operations west of Miles City, Montana. After court injunctions, unsuccessful appeals by employees, and regulatory procedures, the Milwaukee Road abandoned its Puget Sound extension and ended train service through Tekoa and Malden in March, 1980. Other railroads bought portions of the discarded Milwaukee system, but the tracks across the northern Palouse region were sold for salvage and dismantled in 1982.³²

The railroaders remaining in Malden were forced to adapt again. A few moved away to continue with railway work, as some western railroads hired former Milwaukee employees before other applicants. Those who wanted to stay in Malden had to retire early or seek available local jobs, such as with agricultural firms in Rosalia.³³

Malden in the early 1980s is a small residential community with only a few businesses, including a general store, a tavern, and a service station. As in other eastern Washington towns, low housing prices and rents attracted people living on fixed incomes (such as pension, Social Security, or other government payments) to Malden, where they replaced some of the departing railroaders. Malden's population remained about two hundred during the 1970s and into the 1980s. As a social reminder of the town's past, wives of former railwaymen still meet every month as the Milwaukee Club.³⁴

Physical remnants of the railroading era are more obvious in Malden than in Tekoa. Two years after the trains stopped operating, the station and crew bunkhouse remained. Just northeast of town on the grassy bench land above Pine Creek, the concrete ruins of the roundhouse foundation, turntable pit, and water and fuel oil tank supports are reminders of the locomotive terminal that once was one of the reasons for Malden's creation and prosperity.³⁵



Tekoa, 1938

Notes For Part II

¹For the rise of motor competition to railroads, see John F. Stover, *The Life and Decline of the American Railroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 133-143. Cars and trucks in Washington went from 24,178 in 1913 to 173,920 in 1920 and 402,875 in 1928 (U.S., Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1929*, p. 387). *Malden Register*, 17 Nov. 1922, p. 1. From 1916 to 1968 the railways' share of intercity freight traffic declined from 77 percent to 41 percent (with trucks taking most of the lost business) and their share of commercial passenger travel fell from 98 percent to less than 10 percent (with busses and private automobiles accounting for most of this loss). Stover, *American Railroad*, pp. 98, 193, 236.

²Stover, *American Railroad*, p. 172; *Tekoa Blade*, 8 Aug. 1919, p. 1; 15 Aug. 1919, p. 1. The nationwide strike began 2 August and ended 16 August, *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, 3 Aug. 1919, p. 1; 15 Aug. 1919, p. 1. This was a year of much labor unrest and many strikes throughout the United States. The affect of the two strikes on Malden is not known due to lack of sources.

³Stover, *American Railroad*, p. 172; Margaret Gadsby, "Strike of the Railroad Shopmen," *Monthly Labor Review* 15 (Dec. 1922): 1-21; *Tekoa Blade*, 7 July 1922, p. 1; 14 July, p. 1; 21 July, 1. The *Tekoa Blade* printed no strike news after July.

⁴Pauline Hevel, interviewed by Margot Knight, Tekoa, 25 May 1978, Whitman County Historical Society Oral History Collection; Thelma Bruce interview, Tekoa, 8 July 1982 (unless noted otherwise, all interviews are by the author); *Tekoa Blade*, 28 July 1922, p. 5; Al and Ann Peterson interview, Tekoa, 7 July 1982; Greg Smith interview, Tekoa, 8 July 1982. The 1922 strike was the third lost by shopworkers, the first being a walkout in 1911 by Union Pacific shopmen in Tekoa, Starbuck, and Spokane, who sought recognition of their union. The railroad replaced the strikers in Tekoa with newly-hired employees. See *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, 30 Sept. 1911, p. 6; 5 Oct., p. 6; 13 Oct., p. 2.

⁵*Tekoa Blade*, 1 May 1925, p. 1; 26 June, p. 1; 17 July, p. 1; 13 Nov., p. 1; 8 April 1926, p. 1; Earl and Catherine Rawlings interview, Tekoa, 5 July 1982; George H. Douglas, "Tekoa" (1939) 2:1 (typed manuscript, WPA collection, Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma).

⁶*Tekoa Blade*, 27 June 1924, p. 1; 27 March 1925, p. 1; 11 April 1929, p. 1; 19 Dec. 1929, p. 6; 1 May 1930, p. 1; 18 June 1931, p. 1; *The Official Guide of the Railways*, March 1934, pp. 801-802; Dec. 1939, pp. 820-821.

⁷Stover, *American Railroad*, p. 172; "The Tekoa Story: From Bunch Grass to Grain" (compiled by the History Committee of the Community Development Study, Tekoa, 1962), p. 61; *Tekoa Blade*, 23 Jan. 1925, p. 1. Overall figures for Union Pacific employment in Tekoa, derived from census and business directories and mentioned in newspapers into the 1920s, are unavailable after the mid-1920s.

⁸Paul T. Warner, "The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad," *Baldwin Locomotives*, Jan. 1931 [reprinted in *Pacific Railway Journal* 2 (June 1958): 40-41]; James E. Lindsey, "An Economic History of Whitman County, Washington" (M.A. thesis, State College of Washington, 1926), p. 64.

⁹U.S. Census, cited in E.N. Klemgard, "A Comprehensive Report on the Population Characteristic of Whitman County, Washington" (part of the Comprehensive Plan for Whitman County, [Colfax], 1967), p. 11-35; Lindsey, "Economic History of Whitman County," pp. 29, 64; Marlene Mitchell, "Washington Newspapers: Territorial and State. A Bibliography and Checklist" (M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1964), p. 408; *Malden Register*, 1 June 1923, p. 1. Malden's population was 325 in 1940, 332 in 1950, 292 in 1960, 219 in 1970, and 200 in 1980.

¹⁰*Tekoa Blade*, 9 Jan. 1930, p. 1. The extra board was the pool of train crewmen who did not have enough seniority to hold regular jobs on scheduled runs. They worked extra trains and substituted on scheduled runs, subject to call at any time.

¹¹*Tekoa Blade*, 11 Dec. 1930, p. 1; 20 Aug. 1931, p. 1; Stover, *American Railroad*, p. 178; Al and Ann Peterson interview.

¹²*Tekoa Blade*, 4 Feb. 1932, p. 1; 24 March 1932, p. 5; 11 Jan. 1934, p. 1; "The Tekoa Story," p. 430.

¹³Stover, *American Railroad*, p. 178; *Tekoa Blade*, 15 Dec. 1932, p. 3; 20 April 1933, p. 1; 4 Feb. 1937, p. 1; *Tekoa Sentinel*, 17 Dec. 1948, p. 1; *Tekoa Standard-Register*, 1 July 1982, p. 7 (of holiday supplement); Al and Ann Peterson interview.

¹⁴For World War II and American Railroads, see Stover, *American Railroad*, pp. 180-190.

¹⁵*Tekoa Blade*, 11 Dec. 1941, p. 1; 25 Dec. 1941, p. 5; 8 Jan. 1942, p. 1.

¹⁶*Tekoa Blade*, 22 Jan. 1942, p. 5; 20 Aug. 1942, p. 1; G.C. and Marjorie Chaffin interview, Tekoa, 6 July 1982; Wayne Bowmer interview, Tekoa, 1 July 1982.

¹⁷G.C. and Marjorie Chaffin interview; Wayne Bowmer interview.

¹⁸*Tekoa Blade*, 5 April 1934, p. 1; 13 Nov. 1941, p. 1.

¹⁹Between 1945 and 1955 diesel locomotives' share of railroad motive power increased from about ten percent to about ninety percent, displacing steam and even some electric traction. See Stover, *American Railroad*, pp. 251-252. For the advantages of diesel locomotives over steam, see pp. 248-252. The diesel is actually a diesel-electric: a diesel engine drives a generator, which supplies power to electric motors which turn the axles. James L. Ehermberger and Francis G. Gschwind, *Smoke Along the Columbia* (Callaway, Nebraska: E. & G. Publications, 1968), pp. 18-21, 63.

²⁰Al and Ann Peterson interview; Wayne Bowmer interview; Earl and Catherine Rawlings interview; "The Tekoa Story," p. 61 (which lists 1953 as the last year of operation for the roundhouse); Greg Smith interview, 8 July 1982. Union Pacific corporate records, which would contain specifics of the last years at the roundhouse and shops, were not available to the author.

²¹Ehernberger and Gschwind, *Smoke Along the Columbia*, p. 63; *Tekoa Sentinel*, 22 April 1955, p. 1; Dale and Bonnie Smith interview, Tekoa, 5 July 1982.

²²"The Tekoa Story," p. 63; Greg Smith interview, 5 and 8 July 1982.

²³Labor and Industry Committee [Report], "Proceedings: Tekoa Community Study" (mimeographed report produced under auspices of the Bureau of Community Development of the University of Washington, 1960-1961, III: second of two unnumbered pages between pp. 6-7; Greg Smith interview, 5 July 1982. Railroaders actually working in Tekoa included the Union Pacific depot agent and section workers.

²⁴U.S. Census, cited in Klemgard, "Population Characteristics of Whitman County," p. 11-35. After Tekoa the next largest population drops from 1940 to 1960 were 25 percent of Endicott and 20 percent in Oakesdale.

²⁵"The Tekoa Story," pp. 78-80; Wayne Bowmer interview; G.C. and Marjorie Chaffin interview. The Tekoa Hotel remained open until 1972. Since the 1960s Tekoa's population has settled between 800 and 900. See *Rand McNally 1983 Commercial Atlas & Marketing Guide* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1983), p. 540.

²⁶"The Tekoa Story," p. 68; telegraphy display, Tekoa Museum; Harriet Buerger interview, Tekoa, 6 July 1982.

²⁷Author's observations, July 1982. Company housing for section workers in Tekoa disappeared years ago.

²⁸Author's observations, July 1982.

²⁹August Derleth, *The Milwaukee Road: Its First Hundred Years* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1948), pp. 214, 216, 228, 245, 258; *Seattle Times*, 4 Oct. 1979, p. H4; *Washington State Rail Plan Update* (Olympia: Department of Transportation, 1980), p. 109.

³⁰Stover, *American Railroad*, p. 226.

³¹*Rosalia Citizen-Journal*, 18 Oct. 1974, p. 1; C.L. and Helen Preston interview (by telephone), Malden, 13 Oct. 1983.

³²*Seattle Times*, 18 Oct. 1979, p. 1; Blair Kooistra, "How the Milwaukee Road Packed Up and Went Home From the West," *Trains*, Sept. 1980, pp. 33-34; author's observations, April and July 1982.

³³C.L. and Helen Preston interview.

³⁴C.L. and Helen Preston interview; Paul Barkley, "Interpreting Economic Change in Rural Areas," paper presented at a conference (Interpreting Local Culture and History), Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, 5 Nov. 1982. U.S. Census listed 219 residents in Malden in 1970 and 200 in 1980; see *Rand McNally 1983 Commercial Atlas*, p. 539.

³⁵Author's observation, April 1982.



ELBERTON HOTEL

DAVISON, PROPRIETOR

ELBERTON, WASH.

ELBERTON DIRECTORY—1910-11

79

ELBERTON.

Population 500. Is a flourishing incorporated town and railroad station on the main line of the O. R. & N. Co. and the north fork of the Palouse river, 13 miles northeast of Colfax, the county seat, and 358 miles northeast of Portland, Ore. It is noted for the great amount of fruit grown near by, there being nearly 1,000 acres of thrifty, productive orchards of prunes and apples within a radius of a few miles and tributary to this point. A prominent feature is a fruit evaporating plant, with a capacity of 70 tons of green fruit per day. It contains a public school, a water power flour mill, a bank, Elberton State Bank, five grain warehouses, several general and special stores, one hotel, Methodist and United Brethren churches. Land surrounding ranges in price from \$60 to \$75 per acre. Shipments are grain and fruit. Telephone service. Telegraph, Western Union. Express, American. Mail, daily. A. R. Metz, postmaster.

CITY GOVERNMENT.

Mayor—J W Berkstresser.

City Clerk—Hugh Penn.

City Treasurer—A R Metz.

City Marshal—W B Peoples.

Justice of the Peace—J W Berkstresser.

Councilmen—Charles Gage, David Abernatha, Chas Henderson, H W Tipler, G U Irwin.

BANKS.

Elberton State Bank—Capital, \$10,000. Dr W N Divine, pres; J M Seagle, vice-pres; A R Metz, cashier.

CHURCHES.

Methodist Episcopal—Rev R W Mason, pastor. Sunday services: Sunday school, 10 a m; preaching every other Sunday, 11 a m and 7:30 p m. Prayer meeting, Thursday, 7:30 p m.

United Brethren—Rev O N Buchwalter, pastor. Sunday services: Sunday school, 10 a m; preaching, 1st and 3d Sunday at 11 a m and 7:30 p m.

POST OFFICE.

Postmaster, A R Metz; G W Penn, assistant postmaster. Office hours, 8 a m to 8 p m.

PUBLIC SCHOOL.

W LeRoy Wylie, principal; Ada M Anderson, Ina Hack, teachers.

SECRET SOCIETIES.

Woodmen of the World—Elberton Camp No 250. Meets 2d and 4th Saturdays of each month in People's Hall. A R Metz, C C; Hugh R Penn, clerk.

Reminiscences of Elberton

Today the little town of Elberton has become a historical site. While it is home for a few people, it is principally an abandoned village owned in large part by the Whitman County Parks and Recreation Department, with the buildings and adjacent areas being turned into a historical park.

In the late 1800s Elberton was a much more active place. Residents were engaged in such occupations as sawing lumber, milling flour and producing prunes. For a while the town was tied somewhat to the adjacent County Farm, a social agency for the aged and indigent. But these early institutions dwindled and Elberton turned into a small country trading center. Eventually the business area shrunk to one store and, in the mid-1960s, the city government was disincorporated. Thereafter, the county began acquisition of property in the area.

Historic Elberton's best-known institution was the Elberton Picnic, an outdoor social affair of some scale that was held annually from the 1890s until the 1930s. It, and other features of Elberton history, are alluded to many times in the following pages.

In this issue of The Bunchgrass Historian two residents of Elberton present their reminiscences. One is John W. Leid, a farmer, who wrote his story in 1951 as a pencil draft. Mr. Leid's manuscript is rough, and, as he notes, characterized by his lack of education. To present it here incomplete sentences have been filled out and other such changes made. The phonetic spelling of names has been retained, as in some cases we cannot easily determine the correct spelling.

The other reminiscence by an Elberton native is vastly different. It is that of James Orin Oliphant, Doctor of Philosophy and Professor of History, first at the Cheney Normal School and later at at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania.

—Editor

The Statement of John Weber Leid Elberton, Washington September, 1961

Dec. 2 1888 to Sept 1, 1961

I have been asked by P. T. Bockmier and Mrs. W. A. Kincaid to give the history of Elberton and myself.

When I came to this country in Elberton, Dec. 2, 1888, it was a territory. It became a state in 1889, just [at the time of the] building of the OWR & N depot, now gone. There was a post office run by Joe McCoy. There was no school; [residents] had a school in the United Brethern Church—three months in the fall, three in the spring. Mr. Lange came from Steptoe in 1888 on horseback to teach. In 1889 Mrs. Clifford Harding's father, Ben F. Manring taught school.

In 1890 they built a two-room school house. Mr. Haulsted and George Strong taught. In a few years, they built two more rooms on. Mr. Wilson and his sister taught for about two years. Still not room enough so they rented a store building downtown. It was so crowded they could not stick their tongues out. Miss Mary Greer taught her first school. I think Miss Ora Davis went to her. Then they built, 1916, a brick school house, six or eight rooms. Now they are going to Garfield by bus. I think the first teacher in Elberton was Blackwell.

You can see I did not go to school much. Went when my brother missed and he did not miss much. The last teacher I went to was John Lorner(?).

The main business was the sawmill run by Homes, who has one arm sawed off. Then later Lue Averill got it for a few years. He moved it to the mountains. (A parenthetic note in the manuscript says "east of Garfield.") The way they got the logs to the Elberton mill was down the Palouse River. First to Colfax; then Elberton; then Palouse. One year the river went down. Some of the logs lodged at Glenwood so they sawed them into 16-inch wood, so Glenwood had a woodyard well named.

About this time someone built a brick store, a syndicate run by Fred Knott, later by John Price. Also a brick hotel run by Buzard and Loper(?). There was a hotel by the bridge, it run by Grandma Lofts. She had three regular borders, two grandsons—Lester and Dale McDonald—and a girl, Dora Boggs, who had twelve toes and twelve fingers. She had a few beds up in the loft upstairs.

The next good business was the flour mill run by Noah Hunsperger and Dave Prichard and Wattle and Logen Gurnsey and Evens Kelley, who help build the dam. The mill was first built up the Palouse River by a bridge, close to Lang's (?). It was called Chase mill; moved to Elberton about 1886.

Then Hinchlif's (?) brother came to Elberton and bought the mill and built a creamery and put in a store. Ed Chase and Jim Hinchlif, they had a brass band called

the Hinchlif cousins band and a few wanted to be [cousins]. In a few years they moved the mill down by the elevator so it would be by the railroad. It was a big job putting the race (ditch) to it. In a few years, the dam went out. That was the last of the flour mill as water power. It used electric power for a few years.

Clark and Eaton put in an implement and hardware store. There was also in business Dr. W. Divine with an office, a drug store, and a telephone office. The largest business of all was the W. Allen Newberry Oregon Evaporated Co., [which] built a prune dryer at the cost of \$15,000, the largest of its kind in the world. About 1902, they shipped 23 carloads of dried prunes out of Elberton. It finally dried up, due to orchards freezing out.

The printing press had a paper called the "Wheat Belt," run by D. R. Nulty. A harness and shoe shop was run by Art Cathcart. Jeff Turnbow had a blacksmith shop. [Other businesses were a butcher ship and barber shop.]

The County Farm was managed by different ones: Mr. Gleason, Mr. Short and Cox. In 1913, it was sold to George Dodd; it is now owned by Lee Roach. The County bought a farm west of Colfax, and later bought the Bryant and Wiseman hospital, called now the Palouse rest haven. Some can't rest.

In 1894, [residents] started a three-day picnic known as the Elberton Picnic. I went thirty years, until a few years before it quit. It started as a sunday school picnic by C. S. Johnson, Mary Hubner's father that (who) went 32 years. Mrs. Clarence St. John and I never missed. I had the honor to be the president. Richard Hall was the vice president most of the time.

The M. E. Church was built in 1897. Sold in 1960 to Richard Foy for \$75. In 1913, the E. U. B. church built a brick church at the cost of over \$8000. It sold in 1960 for \$500. When started to be built, Grandma Draper, Rev. Cleaven Sharp, C. S. Johnson and George Draper and Jo Van Tine started it.

The Rev. Henry Kerns was among the first preachers in 1885. Those days a preacher got \$300 a year and a house and a few prunes. I have the names of all the preachers of E. U. B. church of Elberton from 1885 to 1955, gotten [together] by Mrs. Dr. Divine and Nora Leid.

The way they threshed when I first came, they headed and stacked the grain. About 1894, [farmers] started to bind. In 1893, my father bought a small thresher, hand feed. Roy Bodine and his father tended the machine and moved it. They got three dollars a day, with teams. Bill Greer ran the engine. Sometimes Harry Clark's father, of Elberton [ran the engine]. Pitchers and bundle drivers got \$1.50 a day. We threshed on what was the Duling farm, now Ed Curt's, between showers till Christmas in 1893. Wheat was 28 and 30 cents a bushel.

In 1894 I worked for Lann Van Tine for 75 cents a day. In 1895 I worked for Jo Van Tine. Commenced plowing February 11th. 75 cents was all a man could get for farm work.

Here is the names of teachers who came from Elberton School:

Harry Irwin
Katie Johnson
Oran Oliphant
Elsie Oliphant
Myrtle Courit(?) McMillen
Clare Frederick Fisher
Tom Kerns

When we came to Elberton we bought eighty acres from J. H. Lausch's father's cousin for \$17 per acre. Forty [acres were] under plow. It is now owned by Mrs. Roy Loman. A few years later, we bought eighty acres across the road [to the] east, next to the Oliphant farm, for \$11 per acre. Ten [acres were] under plow. The Long girls now have this eighty.

Dec. 2. 1888 to Sept 1, 1961. About myself, John Weber Leid.

When I came to Helen and Harison Leid in Cederville, Illinois, March 8th, 1876, I could not walk or talk and had no teeth. I have had three sets since. I still have my first shoes.

So they thought best to give me a name. So John Weber Adams, the brother of Jane Adams, the Hull House worker who started this to help down and out girls—when she died they buried her in a silver coffin—the Adams had the flour mill and were landholders, he said if they would name me after him, he would get me a suit of clothes when I got big enough. Those days little boys wore dresses till they were three or four years old; they did not turn them out with just a diaper on.

On May 22, 1898 I married Nora Elsmore, sister to Mrs. C. E. Averill in Garfield. She was 19 past; I was 22 past. Then we rented my father's farm, as he had bought a house in town and worked at his trade of painting and paper hanging. In 1902 he sold the farm and moved to Waitsburg. As I had never left home, they got rid of me.

As I could not find a farm to rent, I traded my little farm outfit for a house in Elberton and worked for wages. I got \$1.50 a day and boarded myself. That's when I got rich???

In 1905 we rented the Ruby Gregg farm, that his nephew Walter Haun has now. From there, in 1907, rented the C. V. Roberts farm. I was there for 45 years.

In 1935, I had to quit work because of arthritis. Had a sale and sold my farm outfit. As Guy Cronks was getting a tractor, so he had to get rid of his horse outfit, so we had a sale together. He then did my work and I stayed on and managed the farm.

Dec. 18, 1949, Nora, my wife, passed away. I still stayed on at the farm for over two years. Then I had a heart attack and was in the hospital for a while. I could not stay on the farm alone.

On July 1, 1952 I had a sale. Sold my furniture and tools. I came to Dave Parch's to live. On Sept 10th, Mrs. Parch took sick. So I moved to the Johnson Hotel on Sept. 10th. Still there. On October 24th 1954, I married Mary Bryson Muncey in the Elberton E. U. B. Church by Rev. Howard Hopkins of the Nazarene Church. About 300 were there to help. We were married for better or worse; better for me so far. Her folks, Isaac Bryson, came to this country in 1871. He (Bryson) was the first Treasurer in Colfax. Arthur Dole has the Bryson farm now.

Oh yes, Nora and I had our silver and golden wedding in this same church.

I have a brother an two sisters. My brother has a good business in Walla Walla. He is in the life insurance business. He pays folks for dying. My oldest sister Vida McHoes(?) lives in Montana and has 400 acres of land. My youngest sister, who lived in Waitsburg, Dora Davis, passed away in 1948. He husband John Davis passed away Nov. 26, 1960. He put a lot of folks in the hole; he was a grave digger.

by J. W. Leid

The Elberton Picnic

This is the oldest, best attended and most popular picnic in Western Washington. It is purely a municipal affair, being run by town officials: there is no element of personal profit in it, all surplus being used for improvement of the grounds, etc. We have a large pool in the river for boating, bathing, swimming, water polo, etc.; an excellent pavilion for dancing, and besides other features, a magnificent baseball diamond, with grand stands, bleachers and so on. **NO ADMISSION FEE IS CHARGED TO GO ON THE GROUNDS.**

This Year's Date
June 16, 17, 18

Free Grounds—Free Boating

For Concessions, Information, Etc., Address the
Manager

Recollections of Life in Elberton in the Early Years of the Twentieth Century

Written on Nov. 25, 1972

J. Orin Oliphant

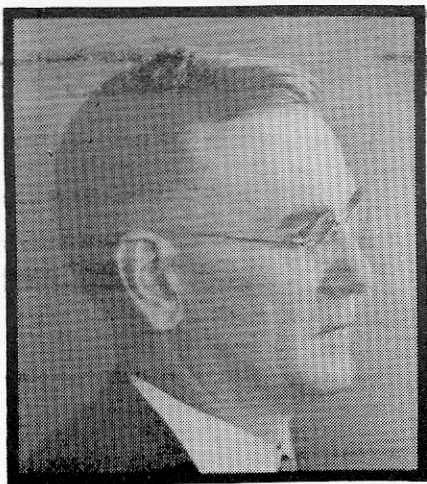
From September, 1901, until May, 1911, I lived in Elberton during the time that the public school there was in session. My father bought a house and a twenty-acre tract on the hill at the eastern edge of this town. This house was near the schoolhouse. From 1901 through 1911 we moved from our homestead, four miles south of Elberton, to our town residence at the beginning of each school year. As the close of these school years, we moved back to the farm to spend the summer. Naturally, my father spent much time alone during each of these school years taking care of the livestock on the farm. He made a considerable sacrifice to send his children to school.

I had attended two short terms in the country school at Glenwood before we acquired our house in Elberton. In September, 1901, when I was seven years old, I entered the second grade in Elberton, and in May, 1911, when I was seventeen, I completed the four-year high school course.

The Elberton high school was small. At no time did it have more than fifty pupils in its four grades, and at no time did it have more than two teachers. Naturally, the graduating classes were small. There were two in graduating class of 1910—my sister, Mrs. C. H. Ogden, a retired public-school teacher who now lives in Tacoma, and Harry Irwin, who later attended what was then called the Washington State College in Pullman. Presently Mr. Irwin joined the faculty of this institution, and for many years he was a member of its department of mathematics. There were also two members of the class of 1911—Leonidas Penn, a bright boy who died prematurely about the middle of the 1920's, and J. Orin Oliphant.

For the most part the instruction in the Elberton high school during the time I attended it was very good. The reason therefor was that nearly all the teachers in those years were young persons who had received a classical education in colleges or universities of the Middle West. They were eager to share their learning with their pupils. Although they were overworked, they saw to it that their pupils got a good grounding in Latin, in English literature and in mathematics. Through no fault of theirs, the instruction I received in science was inadequate. It was based almost entirely on textbooks, for the school had very little laboratory equipment. The high school library was hardly worthy of the name, but it did contain a few excellent books.

In the Elberton high school only two years of Latin were offered. That was the requirement for admission to the University of Washington. Two of my teachers, however, were good enough to take the time to put me through the third and fourth years of Latin. For this favor I have been everlastingly grateful.



J. Orin Oliphant, 1939

—WSU Libraries

My high school training prepared me so well that I had no difficulty competing with other students in the University of Washington, where, in 1916, I received a A. B. Degree *magna cum laude*.

The town of Elberton, during the first ten or twelve years of this century, was a rather prosperous rural trading center. It had, I think, about 300 to 400 inhabitants. It was situated on the north branch of the Palouse River, at the mouth of Silver Creek. Through it ran the main line of the Oregon-Washington Railroad and Navigation Company. For a longer or shorter period during those years, Elberton had a post office, a bank, a drug store (which carried a small supply of books), a hardware store (which sold a good deal of farm machinery), a harness-making shop, two blacksmith shops, a barbershop, a butcher shop, a hotel, and three or four small general stores. It also had (for a few years) a sawmill, a flour mill, a prune dryer, and several warehouses to which farmers in the surrounding country hauled their wheat, barley and oats.

During the years just mentioned, Elberton had a full-time physician. At this time it also acquired a rural mail delivery service extending into the country immediately south, west, and north of this town.

Social activities in the Elberton of my time were, for the most part, centered on the two churches—the Methodist Episcopal and the United Brethren. Here Christmas celebrations were held; here high school baccalaureate exercises were held; and here, each winter, revival, or “protracted,” meetings were held. For some reason or other the high school was not a center of social activities. There were no school dances. Occasionally a debate was held in the high school “room.” The high school had no gymnasium. It was too small to participate in contests with other high schools, debates excepted.

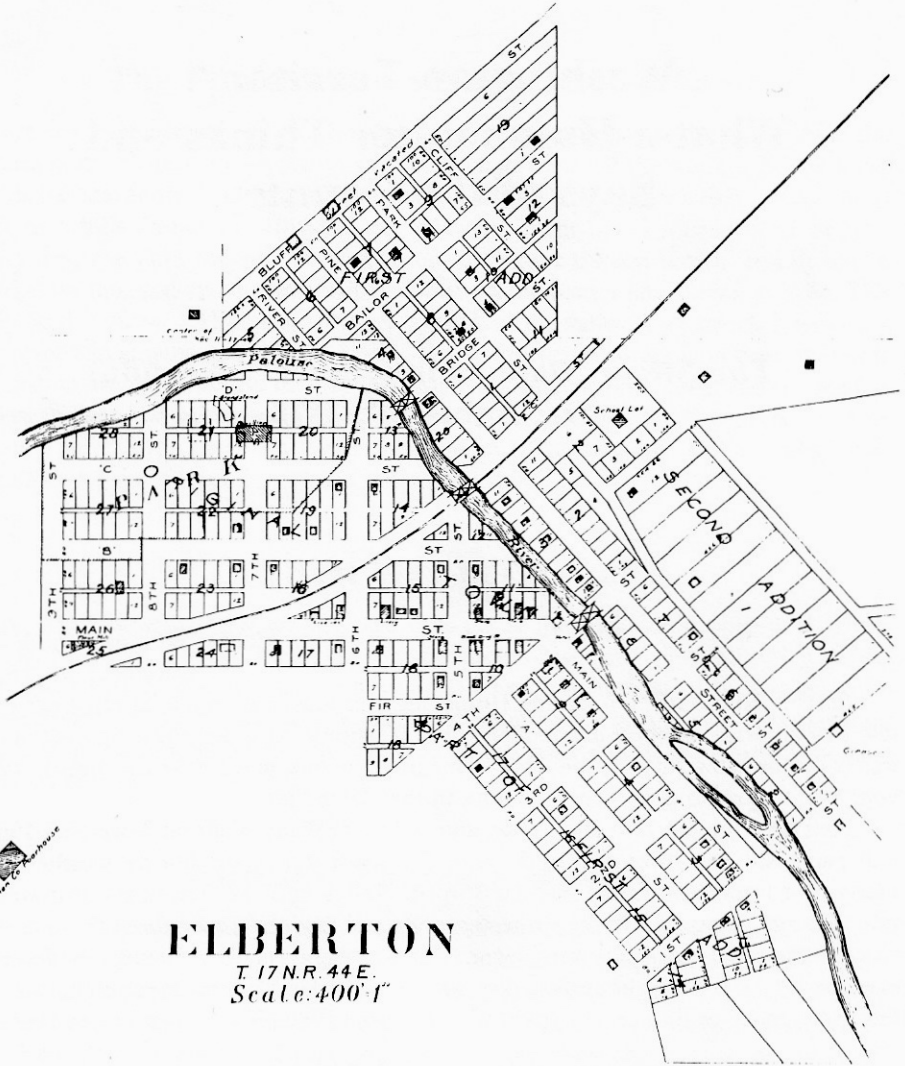
Elberton had no pool room, and early in the period of my residence in this town the saloon (which was in the hotel) was voted out of existence. To some extent the barber shop, especially on Saturday nights, was a gathering place for loafers. Occasionally, during the spring or summer, young men of the town would organize a baseball team, but there was no league to which it belonged. In the winter there was sledding as well as ice skating, and occasionally skating parties were held on the millpond by the light of bonfires.

Here it may be somewhat interesting to insert “a bit of history” that has not heretofore been made known. Its setting was the railway tank, which had been built at the foot of the schoolhouse hill, near the railway bridge. This tank was about seven or eight feet above ground. It rested on wooden pillars that were enclosed with boarding. When I was about ten or eleven years old, the enclosed space under this tank became a club house for the “tough” guys of my age. Here we assembled to “talk big,” to smoke cigarettes which we made by wrapping tea in nearly any kind of paper, and to play cards. We considered it our den of wickedness. It was here that I learned to play poker. More than once I lost all the marbles that I had won by playing “keeps” by staying in a jackpot with a poor hand or failing to draw better cards. Strangely enough, our hideaway was never discovered. Naturally, we did not invite our parents to visit this place.

For the youngsters in those years, the two big events of each year were the log drive and the widely known Elberton picnic. The logs that came down the river from Idaho during the high water of each spring were destined for the sawmill in Colfax. Invariably there was a log jam in Elberton—something that gave delight to small boys and considerable worry to their mothers. A few days after the logs began to arrive, the log-drivers, each one armed with a peavey, came down the river in boats and broke up the jams and set the logs moving again. Like threshing crews in harvest, the log-drivers had a cook shack that was moved down the river with them. The boys in Elberton soon learned that by hanging around the cook shack, they could get “hand outs” of some of the good things that were being prepared for the log-drivers.

The Elberton picnic, which was held each year in June, lasted several days. To it people came from considerable distances and “camped.” Apart from amusements then universally found at carnivals, there would be at each Elberton picnic baseball games, horse races, and especially in election years, some “speaking.” Also, by day as well as by night, there was more or less continuous dancing in a large pavilion. I recall very clearly that at the picnic in 1916, the last one I attended, Senator Miles Poindexter was present. Because I was then a fledgling newspaper reporter, I got an opportunity to “interview” him. I shall never forget the contempt he expressed for President Woodrow Wilson. I didn’t agree with him, but I refrained from telling him so.

By the time of the First World War, Elberton had seen its best days. The sawmill had been removed a few years before. The prune dryer has ceased to operate, the annual log drive was a thing of the past, and the hotel, which had burned, was not rebuilt. During the 1920’s, the decline was rapid. One after another the stores closed, the Methodist church ceased to operate, the high school was discontinued, and eventually the picnic was discontinued. It was a time of rapid change in the Palouse country. The improvement of roads and the increasing use of the automobile encouraged people who once had depended on Elberton for groceries and other supplies to go to larger trading centers. As late as 1947, however, the United Brethern church in Elberton was holding services. But by this time Elberton was taking on the appearance of a deserted village. Its days were numbered, for its usefulness was gone.



ELBERTON
 T. 17 N. R. 44 E.
 Scale: 400' f''



Washington Territory What a Humboldtter Thinks and Says of the Country

From
The Silver State (Winnemucca, Nevada)
December 19, 1879

Colfax, Whitman Co. W.T.
December 5th, 1879

Editor: Silver State: On leaving Humboldt, I promised at least a hundred persons that I would write and give my opinion of this Territory. After writing a dozen or more letters on the same subject, the job became monotonous, and I have concluded, with your permission, to give them a column in the *Silver State*.

I left home on the 12th of October, and arrived at Walla Walla on November 15th. Our party laid over three days of the trip. The roads were good, but the weather was pretty cold from the time we reached Surprise Valley until we arrived at our destination. We had plenty of feed for our teams, grain and hay being very cheap through the Goose Lake country and Eastern Oregon. The bunchgrass on the route was the finest I ever saw, and if the traveler feels so disposed he can stable his horse every night, with a few exceptions, for fifty cents a span. We went from Walla Walla, 80 miles, to Colfax,

The Present Center of Excitement

and land grabbing. The town is situated on Palouse River, at the junction of the North and South forks, and is about the size of Winnemucca, and the center of what is called the Palouse country, and on the line of the prospective Columbia and Palouse Railroad. This road is to be an extension of the Walla Walla narrow-gauge, running northeast to the Northern Pacific Railroad, at or near Spokane Falls. The land grabbing for the last year has been along the line of this proposed road, and the choice locations are pretty well settled. Leaving my family in Colfax, I started on a tour of inspection, the 16th of November. I traveled 90 miles north; thence to the Columbia River,

thence southeast to the line of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Our party camped along the route in favorable localities and examined the land to our satisfaction. Though the weather was wet and stormy we met parties every day on the same layout as ourselves, with their coat pockets full of township plats and surveys, hunting land. The country through which we traveled is

The Finest Body of Agricultural Land

I ever saw in any county. It is covered with bunch grass nearly as thick and tall as the prairie grass in the Western States, and if stockmen here tell the truth, it is a paradise for horses and cattle. The country is generally hilly, and a stranger's first impression is that such hills cannot be cultivated; but I have seen the plows tearing up these hills every day, and have come to the conclusion that where the soil is rich, and there is a market for the produce, the land will be cultivated, no matter how hilly it may be. The hilly land is richer and produces better crops than the valley land, which I believe is the reverse in all other parts of the world. There is plenty of vacant land here yet, but it is hard for strangers to find it. The sheepmen and Indians have destroyed the section stakes in many localities, and most of the settlers, who are holding land for their friends, will tell you positively the land around here is all taken up, and give you glowing descriptions of localities twenty miles from there.

The Best Way to Get Land

here is to first select your locality, and then get at the land office a plat of that particular place, upon which all land held and vacant is designated. The Northern Pacific Railroad owns the odd sections for forty miles on each side of their line, but little of it is taken up. The Company have recently opened offices in all the principal towns for the sale of this land at \$3.00 cash or \$4.00 on four year's time one-fourth to be paid down, per acre.

Climate, Timber and Water

The country is well watered, but in some localities timber is scarce; but the railroad will settle the timber question in a few years. The climate, compared to Nevada, is very wet at this season of the year, but not cold. Farmers are plowing, and they tell me they plowed last year up to the middle of December. The wheat crop this year averaged forty bushels to the acre, and oats and barley crops were also heavy. All kinds of vegetables, but onions especially, do well here. There are but few orchards old enough to bear fruit, but the trees are growing well and look thrifty and healthy, and fruit will be abundant in a few years.

Prices and Markets

Flour is selling at \$3 per barrel; beef 4 cents per pound; pork 5 to 8 cents; oats 25 cents per bushel; barley 50 cents; groceries and dry goods about the same as in Winnemucca. Vegetables are very cheap, and Walla Walla apples sell at 50 cents per bushel. Myself and fellow Humboldters have located at Crab Creek, 60 miles northwest of Colfax,

four miles from the N.P.P.R., and 50 miles above where the road is now being graded. We expect to have the railroad at our doors next May, and a home market for all we can raise. We are so far

Well Satisfied With the Country

but we hold old Humboldt in grateful remembrance, and wish our citizens and silver miners prosperity. This is, however, good poor men's country and for farming, it cannot be excelled. Business of all kinds is fair, and in some places very lively. New towns are springing up, and with projected railroads and heavy influx of population it will be the liveliest country on the coast. G.W. Leach and Bill Wells are the only Humboldters outside of our own party I have met here. They have a fine location on Big Lake eight miles from my place.

I do not write to induce anyone to come here, but I was asked by a great many to give them my opinion of the country, and I have given it based upon what I know from personal observation. Two persons seldom see things in the same light, and what might be pleasing to me might not suit another.

Yours,
John Cady

