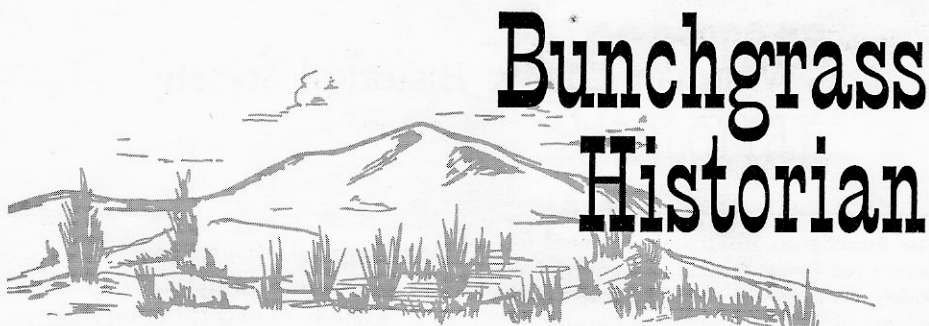


# Bunchgrass Historian



Whitman County Historical Society  
Colfax, Washington

Volume 21  
Number 1  
1993



- **Speed Martin, Baseball Player**
- **Story of a Dairy Farm**
- **Oliver Hall, State Legislator**

# Whitman County Historical Society

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

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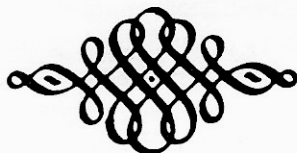
Kyle Jansson spent much of his youth in Pullman, worked as a journalist in Oregon, and is now attending graduate school at Arizona State University.

Helen Monroe grew up on the farm she writes about for Bunchgrass Historian. She now lives in Eagle Creek, Oregon.

James Lindsey was a postal employee in Pullman in the 1930s when he wrote a series of biographies of local figures, including Oliver Hall.

### COVER

Baseball at Johnson, Washington.



## From your editor:

This issue of *Bunchgrass Historian* features the story of one Whitman County native who played baseball in the major leagues. He seems to be the only such, although we have rumors of another in the early years (this second party does not appear in any of the baseball encyclopedias or all-time rosters, only in local tradition, so far unsubstantiated). But Speed Martin did play in the big leagues for a time, and we here present his story.

We do not have contemporary photographs of Martin. Instead photographs of baseball teams from the town of Johnson, taken about 1910, are substituted. The second article is extracted from a longer history of its subject, the Wurgler farm that is located on the northwest corner of the city of Pullman. Again, as in the case of the Speed Martin article, illustrations were difficult. We did have a number of photocopies of historical views of this farm, but these did not work for printing. A few contemporary photos were obscured by trees. What could an editor do? Well, the piece is illustrated with several general farming pictures from around Whitman County. Most are of wheat farming, not of a dairy farm like the Wurgler operation. But they may be of interest regardless.

The last article is a condensed biographic sketch of Oliver Hall, who represented Whitman County in the State Legislature for many years in the early twentieth century. It is not illustrated, making the editor's task easier and more rational.

## Speed Martin

by Kyle Jansson  
December 18, 1992

A century ago, perhaps within throwing distance of the Snake River, the only Whitman County native to play major league baseball was born at Wawawai.

And just 75 years ago, this same Wawawai boy, Elwood Goode "Speed" Martin, won a critical game for the Chicago Cubs that enabled them to win the 1918 National League title and play in the World Series.

Many future major leaguers have played their sport in Whitman County. Pitchers Gene Conley and Danny Frisella and infielders Ron Cey and John Olerud, Jr., played games for Washington State University before reaching the peak of their profession. Other major leaguers such as Ray Washburn of Whitworth College and Ken Schrom of the University of Idaho played games here.

Some Whitman County natives, such as Phil Hinrichs of Pullman, have played minor league baseball, but only Speed Martin, a pitcher, reached the major leagues.

Martin was born at Wawawai in the fall of 1893. Where he grew up is unknown. If he grew up in Whitman County, he might have been introduced to baseball here. Games were being played in the area at least as early as the 1890s.<sup>1</sup>

No matter where he learned the game, Martin began playing professional baseball in 1914 when he signed a contract to play for Medicine Hat, Alberta, in the six-team Western Canada League, a Class D league. Unfortunately for Martin, the team and the league folded after the 1914 season.<sup>2</sup>



*Baseball Team, possibly Colton, WA. c. 1910*

Where Martin played baseball the next three years is unclear. A handwritten card in his file at the National Baseball Hall of Fame lists several teams, but isn't clear whether or how long he played for them. The teams include Seattle in the Class B Northwestern League, Oakland in the Class AA Pacific Coast League, Greensboro in the six-team Class D North Carolina State League, and Muskegon, Mich., in the Class B Central League. (Generally, Class D teams are at the lowest professional level, with Class C the next highest, and so forth until the major leagues.)<sup>3</sup>

By 1917, Martin's contract had become the property of the Chicago White Sox, who, although Martin never appeared in their lineup, traded him on July 14 to the St. Louis Browns for cash. It was with the Browns that the 6-foot, 165-pound right-hander made his major league debut. He failed to win any of the nine games he pitched in for the Browns in 1917, finishing with an 0-2 record and a 5.74 earned run average while allowing 20 hits in just 15 innings. The Browns barely avoided a last place finish.<sup>4</sup>

Before the 1918 season began, Martin and other baseball players were wondering if there would be any major league games because of the country's involvement in World War I. General Enoch Crowder, provost marshal of the armed forces, said baseball was non-essential and ordered men in non-essential industries to find work in the war effort or be drafted. A number of players, including Grover Alexander of the Chicago Cubs, were drafted and American League president Ban Johnson favored closing the ball parks for the season, but club owners blocked the move.

Finally, General Crowder required the leagues to stop play three weeks early on Sept. 1, although he allowed the World Series to take place after that date.<sup>5</sup>

The Chicago Tribune lamented on April 13 that the loss of Alexander would practically wreck the Cubs' chance for the National League pennant that year. There were considerable historical reasons for the newspaper to consider the Cubs a pennant contender. The Cubs had won the National League 10 times in the previous 42 years. The team had also opened a new 16,000 seat stadium in 1914 in a city that, with one team also playing in the American League, a writer said had done more to make baseball the national pastime than it was.<sup>6</sup>

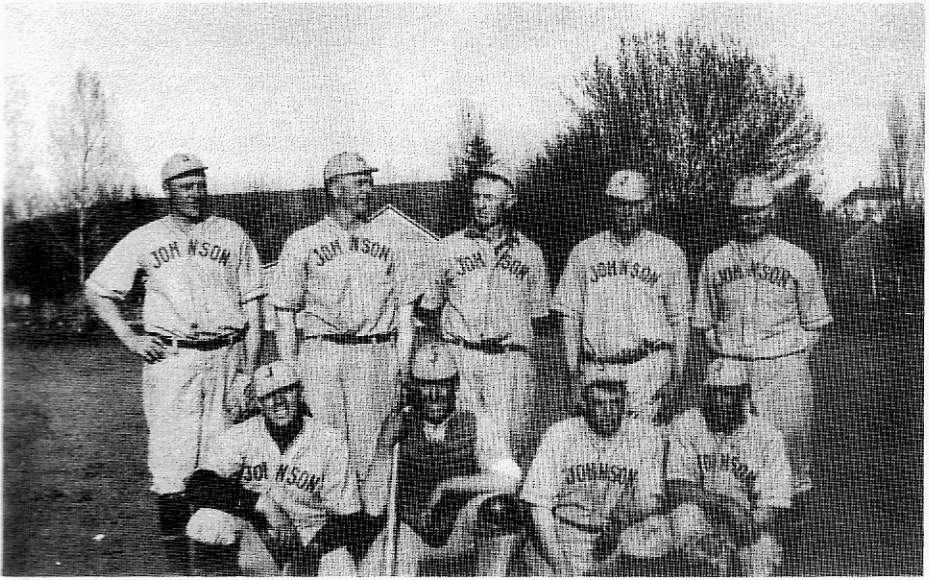
However, Martin helped overcome the loss of Alexander and bring the national League pennant to the Windy City. Starting the season under contract to Oakland, Martin pitched in nine games for the Cubs, winning six and losing two. It turned out to be his best season in the major leagues.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, Martin's performance during the final 10 days of the war-shortened season may have been the peak of his career. On Aug. 19, he shut out the Boston Braves 3-0, allowing just three hits. In a bit of hyperbole, the Chicago Tribune reported that, "Speed Martin, Boss [manager Fred] Mitchell's California recruit, wrote his name permanently into baseball history by shutting the Hubites out, with only three hits, all singletons. The Oakland kid was pitted against Dean Crandall, who was slabbing successfully before Martin was born, and the veteran gave the youngster a tough argument."<sup>8</sup>

Four days later, Martin came back as a relief pitcher in the ninth inning against the Brooklyn Robins, picking up the win in a 3-2 game. The next day, the Wawawai whiz pitched the entire second game of a doubleheader against Brooklyn, allowing just four hits in the 3-1 victory. "Martin held the Robins to four hits and would have blanked them if he had not exuded a wild pitch with a runner on third in the third inning," the Tribune reported. Martin had picked up the nickname of Speed because he had a high velocity fastball, but had difficulty controlling it. Nonetheless, his win against Brooklyn helped the Cubs clinch the National League pennant that day.<sup>9</sup>

The Cubs played the Boston Red Sox in the World Series. Mitchell, however, relied on just two pitchers for all but two innings of the series and Martin never played. The Red Sox won the Series, 4-2, with Babe Ruth the winning pitcher for Boston in two of the games.

Martin pitched for the Cubs for the next four seasons, during which he compiled a 24-38 record. In 1922, he pitched in only one game, allowing five runs and 10 hits in just six innings, and gained the victory. It was his only game in the major leagues that year, and the last time that any Whitman County native has played in the major leagues.<sup>10</sup>



*City Team, Johnson, WA. c. 1910*

The rest of his career in the minor leagues is as cloudy as his first stint there. The National Baseball Hall of Fame files says that he was declared ineligible for both the 1923 and 1924 seasons while being retained by St. Paul of the Class AA American Association. No reasons are given for the status. In 1925, his contract was transferred to Sacramento of the Pacific Coast League and he was allowed to play professional baseball again. Although he had a short stint with Atlanta of the Class A Southern Association in 1927, Martin finished out his career in the PCL with Sacramento, Seattle and the San Francisco Mission Rebs, playing his final game in 1928.<sup>11</sup>

Martin's life after 1928 is nearly as obscure as his life from his birth at Wawawai to his professional baseball debut at Medicine Hat. He worked for a while at General Dynamics in San Diego and won the 1965 San Diego Golf Association Senior Amateur Championship. He died in 1984 in California.<sup>12</sup>

The lack of Whitman County natives among the 13,000 other major league players could be attributed to the county's small population, as well as to the weather. Springtime rain and snow in much of the county have hindered players for years. Even if Speed Martin faced little rain and snow in growing up in Wawawai or somewhere else, he had to overcome obstacles such as his lack of ball control, to play in the major leagues. Some day, another Whitman County native may overcome enough obstacles and play in the major leagues.<sup>13</sup>



## Notes

1. *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, eighth edition. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1990), 2023. This lists Martin's birthdate as Sept. 15, 1893. The *Register of Births, 1891-1907* in the Whitman County Auditor's Office includes an entry for a baby boy Martin, born Dec. 13, 1893, the son of J.M. and Eliza Martin.
2. Speed Martin file, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum; Robert Obojsky, *Bush League: A History of Minor League Baseball*, (New York: MacMillan, 1975), 395.
3. Speed Martin file, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.
4. *Baseball Encyclopedia*, 2023, 2447.
5. Allison Danzig and Joe Reichler, *The History of Baseball* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1959), 69-70; Donald Honig, *Baseball America: The Heroes of the Game and the Times of Their Glory* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1985), 91.
6. *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1918; Ernest J. Lanigan, *Baseball Cyclopedica*, (New York: Baseball Magazine Co., 1922), 6, 13.
7. Speed Martin file, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum; *Baseball Encyclopedia*, 2023.
8. *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 20, 1918.
9. *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 24 and Aug. 25, 1918; James K. Skipper, Jr., *Baseball Nicknames: A Dictionary of Origins and Meanings*, (Jefferson, N.C., and London: McFarland and Co., 1992), 181.
10. *Baseball Encyclopedia*, 2023.
11. Speed Martin file, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.
12. Letter to author from Bill Carle, head of the Society for American Baseball Research Biographical Committee, Jan. 8, 1993.
13. Kyle Jansson, "Spring ball: a chilling experience," *Moscow Magazine* (Spring 1984) 7. *USA Today Baseball Weekly* November 22, 1991.

**From the Mountains of Switzerland  
to the Rolling Hills of Pullman, Washington**

**Wurgler Farm Memories**

**A Historical Heritage**

**Written by Helen Monroe  
Daughter of Chris Wurgler**

This is the story of an old Pullman landmark — in the past called **THE WURGLER DAIRY**. It has a unique history.

Christian or “Chris” Wurgler as he was known, came to the United States of America from Switzerland — the part that bordered Northern France (Alsace Lorraine). The farm on which his family was raised (their old “home place”) which housed parents and his nine brothers and sisters was located in such a manner that they all took delight and pride in pointing out the fact that on their farm acreage — one foot could be on soil of Switzerland and the other foot could be on the French side. When we were back there in 1937 visiting, I had a chance to meet aunts, uncles and many, many cousins. To hear them answer their parents in French as they were spoken to in German or a Swiss dialect made me feel quite the dunce!

Competition at the farm as to who would be in charge or buy out the “home place” forced Christian Wurgler to “take up his yoke,” so to speak and head for America’s freedom shores. The year was 1906. He settled in Pullman, Washington after visiting cousins in Pennsylvania and Ohio. First he was in a dairy partnership with a Mr. Goldsmith and the Cloverleaf Dairy existed. Later he became more independent and The Wurgler Dairy was established. Chris Wurgler had a fine Holstein herd that supplied milk and cream to Pullman residents as well as W.S.C. (Washington State College now called W.S.U.). It’s said, he thought Pullman would be a wise place to raise and educate a family.

Chris Wurgler was a proud, practical, industrious, decisive, hard-headed, level headed, intelligent, stern, dedicated man. Courage, steadfastness and determination could be correct descriptions added to that list.

As to settling in Pullman — sometimes it took a horse drawn wagon to get the “good for the health” cow juices through the tremendous snow drifts! It is also a fact (I heard it discussed) that sometimes “papa” wondered what caused him to continue westward to settle in rolling hills type country as compared to a Wisconsin dairyland scene or Puget Sound type terrain. Water in those areas would not have been at such a premium.

As we — a brother and two sisters grew up on our farm — we learned about conservation every day. All dish water was saved to be dumped out to any garden flowers and plants that constantly gasped for moisture. We never experienced the luxury of a bathtub full of water — we “made do” with inches.

Human interest stories of Chris Wurgler should be included even though I will condense them and insert them here.

He fired an entire haying time crew because he got mad at their balkiness about working too long on an evening. Papa wanted the hay put in before bad weather might set in. He told them all to hit the road and made out their checks of severance pay. Secretly he told a couple of them to come back later.

His sense of fun can be told of letting us all in on a contest of who could spit cherry pits the farthest and he was always the winner.

He bought left over 4th of July fireworks and let high schoolers come out in an open safe area for a wonderful night display.

He gave sleigh ride experiences to dozens of young high schoolers.

He parked where he wasn't supposed to in Lewiston alleyways while he negotiated on buying grapes for wine making. Mama had to tolerate the horn blowing of irate produce delivery men and he'd stroll out at his convenience.

He had to take a “back seat” to mama as she gave him “h” “e” double “l” for cutting down her favorite bush — a mock orange she enjoyed by the kitchen window.

He had to tell a minister he couldn't contribute to the church because mama thought the minister was a crook. He had said Chris had plenty of money because he put water in the milk he delivered. Mama had not been in America long and thought he was insulting papa's honesty instead of making a joke. She called papa into the kitchen and said he was NOT TO GIVE A SINGLE DIME. Papa tried to explain! I don't know the outcome of that episode.

The trees which “papa” had planted as a wind break and also for beauty's sake were a real challenge insofar as hauling extra water from town plus getting any buckets of H<sup>2</sup>O that could be recycled from various



household chores. Even the old fashioned Maytag squeezed out plant sustenance through the wringers. The sadness of the death from farm fire heat of some of those trees — Russian Olive, Locust, and even a beautiful blue spruce still “gets me.” Yes — very different now. Fortunately, some remain. The old orchard had Royal Ann cherries, Lamberts, pear and apricot trees and several kinds of apples.

Later years bought drastic changes in reference to Chris’s homestead land being a dairy — a dairy of such size and of such good management that the president (Dr. Holland) of W.S.C. would phone to ask if he could bring a group of people and visitors from some other state to come out view the site and operation. At that point of time of my life, I was excited and delighted and probably “underfoot.” It “paid off” folks! I’d get a fifty cent piece or sometimes a silver dollar!! Boy oh boy, did I ever make tracks back up to the house to “show off” my gift! Where oh where is my good old fashioned metal Benjamin Franklin bank? Those were the days, my friend — they did end!! At the time, however, those silver dollars looked like bricks of gold and that man looked ever so impressive! Any antique dealer with “smarts” would cherish my old savings bank — much better than the plastic of today.

There is so much to write — another chapter could tell of the land being sold. The first time after papa’s death, the price was spoken of as being “high” or at least “very good” at \$250.00 per acre. The oldest daughter of Chris — Martha — after her step-mother’s passing retained some of the



original 260 acres as a home place for herself. Later she sold 13 of those at even a far better settlement. (It was up to \$2000.00 per acre by then). It is on those acres we can now enjoy and appreciate the very fine Pullman High School. Since Martha, “Mart” to me, Miss Wurgler to others, had been a school teacher for years before her stint in the armed services on the European front, she really could appreciate the value of that school view from her kitchen and gardens. That high school! Students, the between class bells, the intercom system peeling out names she was familiar with — all those things were like a symphonic orchestration to her ears! Martha’s love of students opened her heart to the continued use of a pathway which crossed her field. This was on the condition that they would keep it a single width and be certain no trash would be dropped. (This path is a short-cut from a nearby neighborhood and just sort of grew). Those who used it, cooperated beautifully as she too, cooperated with the law to “post it” NO TRESPASSING at various intervals. This is a practice which continues.

I might as well at this point interject another past Wurgler place happening. Years ago, Chris set up a device which would alert him in his bedroom if the pack of dogs would return to kill more of Martha’s pet rabbits. They did return around midnight. The quickly set up alarm was sounded! Dairyman Chris jumped out of bed, leaving on his old fashioned nightgown. Quickly he pulled on his overalls. The large rubber barn yard boots were easy to slip into. He grabbed a gun and away he flew in swift pursuit.

The dogs bolted away — papa was hot on their trail and tails! In front of him was a barbed wire fence. (In those days each crop was separated by fences). As he tried to climb through with gun in hand, mama suddenly

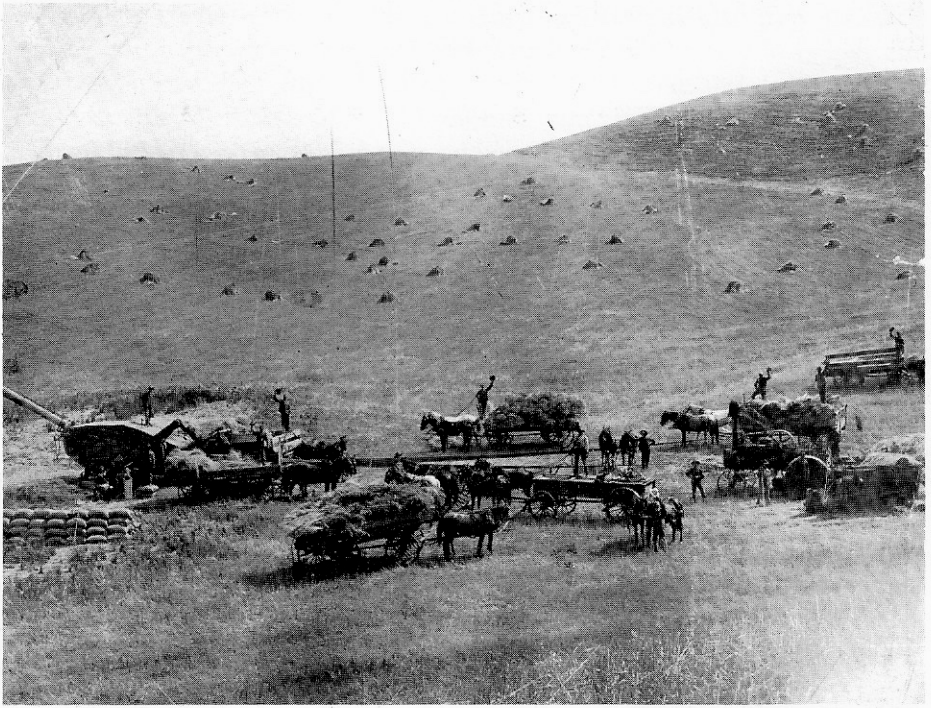
yelled or called, (he said she “yelled”) “NO, NO papa” because she saw the nightgown sticking out of the overalls and thought it would get hooked up on the barbed wire! Papa turned around to retort “be quiet woman.” The dogs were making thier great escape! Now you talk about MAD! Papa was furious! Poor mama at that moment took the brunt of blame. He claimed if she had kept quiet — he’d have had ’em for sure!! Those dogs went faster than a cheeta on the run and were never seen again. Memories of my sister’s dead rabbits still linger because every Sunday when we would go as a family for a “mi-boom-a-li” (A Swiss dialect term meaning a short pleasurable drive), “Mart” would ask permission to stay home alone so she could take care of her beloved rabbits.

Now in my story telling time I’d like to tell you the reason for my second chance to be in Germany, France, Italy, and Switzerland. Much was learned; much is remembered. It is unusual to tell you such an opportunity stemmed from a dreadful fire!

Papa had gone back to Europe (year 1926) to get a chief cook ’n bottle washer, a wife, a new mother for four motherless children after his first wife, Anna, had passed away in 1924 at age 37. Housekeepers were turning out to be a real fiasco, a complete failure insofar as reorganizing his “no-wife-life.”

He took me — not quite four years old at the time — back to Switzerland and Alsace-Lorraine to shop around for another “mama”. There people spoke of another Anna (Anna Rau) who had never married. She was a cook for private well-to-do families; she had even cooked for “royalty” in Spain. Possibly, friends told Chris, this would be someone with the gumption and stamina to go to America. Can you imagine!! Talk about the fascinating meetings that take place in some singles clubs! They would be mediocre in comparison as to combinations or a partnership which might take place!

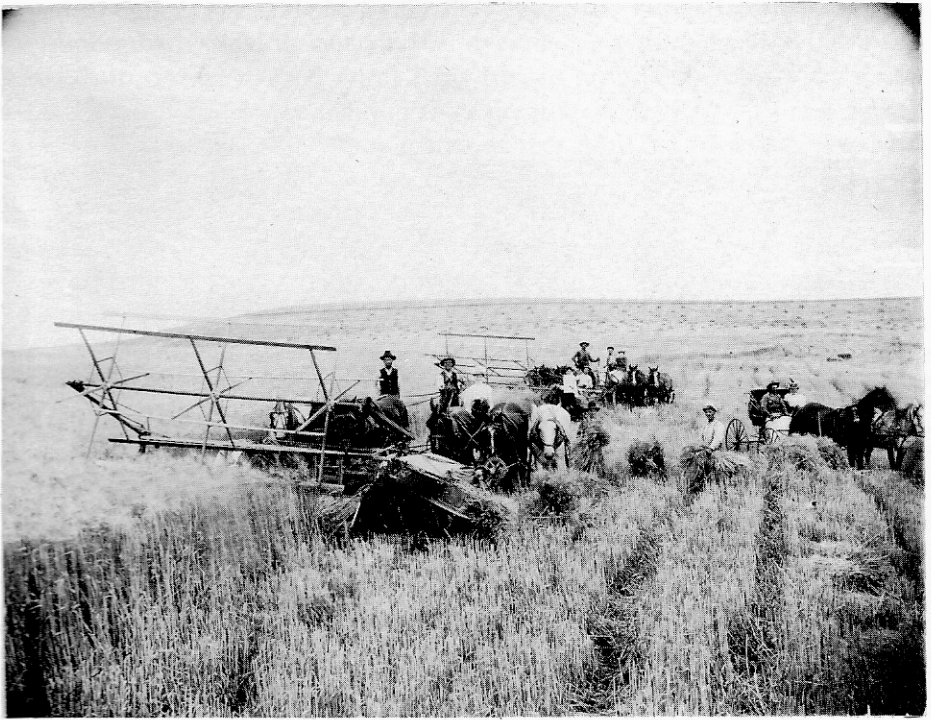
“Papa,” so his friends expounded was a “fine catch.” Why he had a big dairy in the land of milk ’n honey. An added plus must surely be this honey of a brown eyed will behaved little girl. Some whispered among themselves she must have been brought along as “bait.” No one told Anna how hard she’d have to work or that the “rich” dairyman was actually in debt. It’s certainly safe to assume Anna and Chris did not talk too much about how vastly different the state of Washington (at least that eastern part) would be or how tricky the language barrier would be with the three other motherless children. Two of them were close to being teens and the oldest — a son — was a teenager whose loneliness for his true mother would effect him for years and years. The circumstances were very trying. A “step mama” was an unknown future. In the later years, George, the hardest hit at that time of his life, told how he came to respect and love the “new mama.” His lanky frame took kindly to her cooking skills! That helped a



great deal. All the rest of us picture him still with a slice of home made bread in each hand heading down the path to milk the cows. Each slice of bread would be loaded with beautiful strawberry or raspberry or apricot jam.

Back in the area of relatives all bent on helping Chris find a “frau”, mama gave me soft, shy smiles, nodded yes and proceeded to pack her bags to the new world called America. Years later she told me how difficult it was to leave her books and brothers and sisters. Papa promised to bring her back in five years. His five year foresight backfired — too much to do in Pullman! Little things, you understand — such as cooking in summer time for at least fifteen or more each day during harvest time. There was canning galore to be done for winter time sustenance, school clothes for four growing rapidly bony ones, learning the language, garden to tend, even to help sew up wheat sacks! The trying to adjust to everything and everyone was exhausting! There was no time to be sick or complain. Each day had to be faced “head on.”

Of course I, this writer, being the “baby” was in a blissful world. There was no reason to see or know of any unhappiness she might have had in her heart. Now understand, I was good as gold compared to the older kids — just kidding folks! We — none of us dared to be too sassy or independent. Just a look out of “pops” eyes was a pretty squelching reprimand. Mama could scold but was, as both were, firm and fair.



It was a “kind and gentle” atmosphere with a very strong foundation! The canning, cooking, cows, chickens, and chores of all calibers were a challenge. Mama passed all tests and truly earned our respect and love. Years later (I seem to use this phrase often — but isn’t it wonderful when people “speak up and speak out” their inner heart-felt thoughts to us so that our understanding of life and them is enhanced!) as she sat under a shady tree on a “rest-a-bit bench,” she told me she never regretted her decision to come to America. “This place is saved for you, Helen. You have made a happy life for me.” Is it any wonder I will always and I do mean always — think of that as “home.” All the people who came to pay tribute and farewell to my oldest sister Martha, chuckled at the part of the eulogy speech wherein I said “when I was younger, I couldn’t get out of Pullman fast enough. Now I am back and can appreciate this town and also feel “right at home.”

Now to proceed to the **BIG FIRE**. It created an interesting influence to my life. Retention is described in the dictionary as “power of retaining, especially ideas.” The **BIG FIRE** certainly has the power of bringing back recollection of things, miles and people and even my old pet dog named “Tailspin Tommy.”

After the **BIG FIRE** — I repeat purposely because it was so influential on so many people, my papa said in a voice filled with anguish — “Mama



— we best go back to see our brothers and sisters before they too pass away.” He had just experienced and witnessed the tremendous loss and devastation of a life’s work — all up in heat and smoke and death of some very valuable livestock. (A pure bred bull, some calves, and a mother pig with 10 little ones had been in barns where escape was impossible).

The dairy herd was sold after the farm buildings, tons of hay and the animals just spoken of were all an ash heap. It was dreadful! The flames were seen for miles and miles. Spontaneous combustion was something I learned about “the hard way” — not out of a book or from a country western tune — “The cold Hard Facts of Life.” I learned from a true on the scene experience!

“Tailspin Tommy” — my pet German Shepherd dog was in some respects a hero. He jumped on the bed in the bunk house to awaken a hired hand. They in turn were able to drive the marvelous Holstein herd out of the barn yard area. The sale by auction of those cows brought forth the collars for travel for all of us.

The house was saved by the Grace of God, a last minute shift of wind, efforts of the Pullman Fire Department, and hard, diligent work of a C.C.C. crew! (Civilian Conservation Corps — an agency set up by U.S. Government to give work to young men who had no jobs. Franklin D. Roosevelt idea/set up by Congress in 1933/they got \$30 a month and their “keep”).

The tons of hay remained unbelievable hot for two weeks. During the initial burning of the hay and barns it was impossible to be within three to four hundred feet. Consequently all efforts were put in trying to save the house. A grove of trees — some very choice, which the Washington State Horticulture Department had helped Chris select, were lost by heat. Tanks of water brought out by the Pullman Fire Department were poured on the roof of the house. Despite that, one side was seared like a steak on a barbecue grill. Then came the blessed change of wind direction. The gully that is still between the house and the new Pullman High School looks mighty important to me!

A memory scene comes back to me of standing in an upstairs bedroom (George’s room — it’s still called) there by the window my body stood and my eyes bugged out. Under shock, I was, as I looked out to see the corner of the old horse barn “catch” fire from the what we called “The big barn”!! Oh how those flames leaped! It was horrible, yet evidently fascinating in some respects. Mama came up the “difficult to climb” stairs. She whipped to her right into George’s room and saw me standing idle as if in a trance — eyes staring and body stiff.

She was not, as the expression goes — “just a mere housewife” or slave to a farm kitchen stove. In reality, mama was truly a psychologist, as astute as any doctor! She recognized a “zombie” when she saw one! This



remedy of hers by today's judgment might be described by some short sighted people as being abusive. Thank goodness she used common sense and put both hands on my shoulders. She Shook me with a Capitol S!! "Helen - snap-to; get busy!" The exorcism was quick, effective and lasting.

Perhaps a spell binding situation takes a little more rub-out time. It is a fascinating experience and truly unforgettable to view a big fire. The leaping colorful flames are a devil's dance. I was probably still slightly "under a spell" or "nuts" or however you want to describe the non-logic of my next move. My high school English teacher would correct non-logic to illogical. Whatever — I must have envisioned myself as a heroine in an old silent movie film strip with demons chasing me to hurry and save the old farm house possessions! Oh yes — strength and movement returned like a silent ghost as I grabbed of all things — a mattress! This monster I tried to wrestle down the treacherous curve on those old wooden stairs!

Mama's voice again! It penetrated as a voice yelling "go get 'em Tex" in an old theater house showing a cowboy and Indians "show" while all the kids were stunned into silence under the suspense of the plot. Mama's voice had disgust in it and the implication of "how dumb can this girl be!" She yelled this time — "get the blankets, Helen. Put them way outside; then hurry back up here to help with this straw hamper-trunk. I brought this from Switzerland and I'm not going to take a chance on losing it now!" All these words were coming out like little hail pellets bouncing rapidly on a tin roof.

I puzzle as to how many old timers there are living today that know of an interesting aspect of the spontaneous combustion story. There was a strange fragrance around; sometimes it seemed more like a distasteful odor. It would come and go somewhat like a mysterious vapor. The pretty locust trees had blossoms and I personally thought they were emanating an unusual perfume. Like I've said — I was in my own happy world. I had a strong swing on a huge tree down by the chicken house. Even though I was too much of a scardy cat to ride a horse I think I was a regular Tarzan as far as swinging high to the sky on that swing. Why, I could even chop off the head of a chicken. But insofar as being too aware of any trouble on the farm, I could be counted on as being absolutely worthless.

Papa, on the other hand realized something was amiss and because of the haying time weather conditions he suspected the hay in the barn as a possible problem. He enlisted the knowledge and help of people at Washington State College to look into the matter. Someone or probably several in the engineering department came up with an ingenious idea. A device was made to test the degrees of heat in the stored hay. It was a long slim pipe as I recall with a potent thermometer inserted in it. This was probed into various areas every day. The temperature was going down but danger was still present. Papa went one day into town to check where he stood insurance-wise. He was assured he was fully covered as always and then the agent exchanged what's known as small talk or news of the day.

One quiet — almost eerie night — I heard a noise outside my upstairs bedroom window — the upstairs one which faces the old garage opposite the family room windows downstairs. Out of bed I went and snooped. Well, what do you know — of all things our old nags — two horses "Blue" and "Gee" are trudging up the road instead of being in the barn yard. I awaken papa — its about midnight and he and I chase the horses into some kind of enclosure and close a gate. I still remember how eerie quiet it was. The air was so still and no wind whatsoever. About two thirty or so there was a huge explosion!! The wind had come — the devil himself and all his helpers fanned the hot hay. When an air pocket of air hit that wet type "heating-up" hay — the experts later figured the spontaneous combustion was inevitable.

After all the shock, crowds, hoopla and work and reorganizing was somewhat under control, papa went back to check on what could be done in respect to his insurance coverage. Papers were shuffled, feet scraped nervously on the insurance office floor and someone had the horrible job of telling Chris Wurgler that someone had made a mistake and the tons and tons of hay, etc. were NOT INSURED! Wiped out! Wiped Out!

A new refrigeration plant had recently been installed in the "milkhouse" which had an insurance policy of a more recent date. That was intact and up to date. (The insurance people had not checked the older policy and it



was not in good standing.)

But remember the house was intact — all our lives were bruised but not buried. Our wills and our hearts still had strength, our futures all held prospects and perspective, there was a challenge as to future plans.

Remember too — upstairs mattress still O.K., blankets still O.K., and now 53 years later my daughter, Theresa (named after an aunt in Switzerland) has the old straw hamper-like trunk. The railroad ticket shows the trunk traveled from New York to Cutbank, Montana of all places — before settling down in Pullman, Washington!!!

Through my growing up years my delight was to visit the city dump whose grounds hooked onto our fields. People threw all kinds of “goodies” away — vases, wooden shoes, magazines I was not allowed to look at at home. Oh there were trinkets and all kinds of trash I packed home. I was allowed to go prowling down there if all my chores were done and I had to be sure to come back in time to set the table and help with dinner. It wasn't too easy to give up my searching just a little while longer and try to find another treasure. How I liked being there when the drivers came with a fresh load!

My fathers feelings for the dump were quite different. It emanated stench, smoke, fire danger to the crops and spelled NUISANCE AND ANNOYANCE. The fences were full of papers which flew against them. I have many times swatted burning grain with wet gunny sacks to try to quickly stop destruction of the crops. I remember the struggle papa had to convince the city that the loads must be bulldozed over and vegetable and food matter covered. The rats! Oh they were true monster size. I hated them with a passion. How dare they be in the way of my archeologist digging domain. Papa had checked with those in charge as to the O.K. of my being there at various times. But I loved to skip through our field and a

non-grain area produced lovely, lovely buttercups which I picked for mama's kitchen. Once I thought I heard a rattlesnake's rattle, but couldn't swear to it in court. Later in that area there was a mink farm. Boy, the caretakers wore protective gloves — the likes of which I'd never seen — strong and long. The mink had beautiful brown fur and beady eyes — I can "see 'em" still. Then there are some memories of the butcher house — those weird odors emanating from there I've blocked out of my mind and put them in my "phewy pugh" category.

I just love looking back on all the love and comfort I experienced in my past. Sometimes as I walked home from school in winter time, my legs were scratched by the icy crusts of snow I'd plow through — strictly my fault folks — I was too pride-filled to wear "long johns." Oh no, I wanted to act tough and wore ankle socks! Guess mama gave up and thought I'd soon get smart. Sometimes I'd hide tears as I "thawed out" after hitting the almost too warm school room. Oh how my toes hurt! Guess it all toughened my up for my sixties!

Thank goodness I had the good fortune to have a strict English teacher — Miss Bell. Little did I dream that I would sit down to write and be so reminiscent.

The pictures I have of as we called them "cousins by the dozens" in Europe, are another recollection. The trip back across the United States to see Washington D.C.'s White House, the cacti in New Mexico and cotton, white as snow in California, oil rigs pumping — I don't even remember where, the chance to meet a somewhat unusual relative in Colorado who was a bachelor prospector were all educational experiences. In the last will and testament of the far removed relative bachelor, my father was named as the executor of his life's belongings and wishes. This led to hearing from a housekeeper who claimed a will had been destroyed! She had seen with her own eyes that a house was "left to her" and that "papa" was in charge of seeing to it that mining stock go to relatives in Europe. Papa passed away before he could grasp all this startling news, but mama followed through. Through testimony in a court of law she was able to help establish the authenticity of the so called lost will which someone had actually destroyed for their own benefit. The rightful papers and monies were properly disbursed. That type of experience for mama — my second mother was a long, many life miles away from being a cook in Switzerland before coming to a Pullman dairy farm!

Mama had a flair for life. She had a gift of words and languages. She could speak German, French, some Spanish, some Italian and her English vocabulary was outstanding. Like the Statue of Liberty — she was "quite a lady." Chris Wurgler was lucky — we, his family were lucky — Pullman, Washington was lucky. Yes indeed, my life has been blessed.

January 1989  
Helen Monroe

## **Oliver Hall**

**by  
James Lindsey, 1934**

The Hall family can trace their ancestry back to about 1500 in England. In the course of time when the colonies had been established in the New World there were two brothers who came to North America. The one went to the north and set up his family tree in Vermont; the other went to the South and his family descendents hail from North Carolina.

Luman Hall was born in Vermont July 24, 1815. Lydia Ann Crossett was born January 1, 1817 in Peru, New York. They were married March 8, 1838 in Plattsburg, New York. Their oldest child; Juliette (Smith) was born in Vermont in 1839. The family moved to New York state, in 1840. There Heman D. was born in 1841; Edward L. in 1843; Francis L. 1845; Jane Annette (Robbins) 1848; Sarah (Morrison) 1850; Oliver Hall Feb. 17, 1852 in Canton New York. Alice (Jackson) 1853; and Elmer Ellsworth in 1861 in Wisconsin.

The family moved across the line into Ontario in 1854. Luman Hall was a wagon maker and the company employing him had work on the Canada side of the line. Next the family moved to Wisconsin in 1857. Luman and his sons Heman and Edward were all three soldiers in the Civil War. Luman carried off the first man killed at the battle of Shiloh. He himself was wounded in that battle. They were each three years or more in the service. Oliver was the biggest boy left at home and early learned to take responsibility.

When the war was over in 1865 the family moved to Minnesota. Since the father was a wagon repair man it was natural that the son should learn the trade also. He worked with his father at the trade in Minnesota until 1868 when the family tried farming. Oliver was now sixteen and according to his own admissions could not tell wheat from oats as it grew in the field.

He was not handicapped by traditions nor bound by long standing customs and his native wits helped him in this new work.

1876 found Oliver Hall, now a young man, in Seattle where he came "just looking around". The next year the family, on his recommendation, came to Colfax, Wash. There they set up a shop for repairing wagons, pumps etc. Luman Hall died in Colfax in 1880 and his wife Lydia in 1889. Oliver continued to run the shop and live at the Colfax Hotel till 1918. During this time he also was in the undertaking business. In 1918 he moved on the farm of 100 acres a mile east of Colfax. His nephew, Mr. Morrison, also a bachelor is his housekeeper, chauffeur, cook and factotum.

Mr. Hall has always been public spirited. He served on the city council of Colfax a few years. He was sent to the state senate from Whitman county in 1894 and since that time has missed two terms and the last session; five years out of forty. While Mr. Hall was useful all around in preventing freak laws and helping to enact sensible ones his main work was on the Roads Committee.

Mr. Hall has been a knight of Pythias for 57 years and has been highly honored by his fraternity. Nearly as long in the A.O.U.W. where he also has held positions of special honor. He has been a Mason for fifty seven years.

Here the interview ended and Oliver Hall with his nail apron and shingling hatchet went up on the roof to lay shingles. It is a dangerous thing for a reporter to keep on writing after the interview has ended. It is also dangerous for a man eighty two years old to get up on a house to shingle the roof. It is also Mr. H's fault that this story is so short. Usually it takes a page or two to tell of the wife's family and another page or even several pages to tell about their children. With the best of intentions the reporter was unable to write a thing along this line.



The first of our modern roads in this country was built near the Wye (Pullman Junction) south of Pullman. The U.S. Government furnished the crusher and grader and other machinery and did the engineering and Whitman county did the work. This was in 1907. A wet muddy stretch of road between the concrete bridge and the hill was carefully graded and drained and macadam put in place and rolled. It has been re-surfaced at different times but is still in good condition.

This was a show place for people coming to Pullman and the State College. People demanded such roads and the first laws had elaborate plans of

sharing the costs. The state paid the lion's share. The county a part and at first the adjacent land owners paid some fifteen per cent. This part was assessed against the land in strips; the closest strip paying higher (7%) than the intermediate (5%) and the strip farthest paying about 3%. Next the Donohue Law gave the adjacent property owners one fourth of the burden. In this way was the Colfax Pullman road first macadamized for its full length. The Donohue Law was in force when the Steptoe St. John road was built. This was before the gasoline tax made road building easily financed.

While other states have bonded themselves to build good roads and have had the pleasure?? of paying for them twice our state of Washington has not followed that practice. (Figure it for your self; a twenty year bond at 5% just doubles itself.) Some one in authority had the good sense to wait a year with our building program and build roads as the gas tax was paid in. Thus while other states pay half of their taxes to bondholders as interest we use all the money to build roads. Some one should have this well deserved credit and who else was in position to have more to say than Mr. Hall, the veteran State Senator from Whitman county?

