

Bunchgrass Historian

Whitman County Historical Society Quarterly

Volume 16, No. 2

Colfax, Washington

Summer 1988



Isaac I. Stevens

- **The Pacific Railroad Survey in the Palouse Country**
- **More Reminiscences of a Pedagogue**

CONTENTS

Exploration of the Palouse Country The Pacific Railroad Expedition	3
More Reminiscences of a Pedagogue S. C. Roberts.....	12

THE AUTHORS

The Pacific Railroad Reports were written by I. I. Stevens, Territorial Governor of Washington. The extracts are taken from the twelve-volume report.

S. C. Roberts reminiscences began in the last issue of Bunchgrass Historian and are continued here.

Cover Illustration — I. I. Stevens.

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

OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

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

PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

Editor Lawrence Stark
Associate Editors Suzanne Myklebust
Fred Bohm
Subscriptions Gwenlee Riedel
Circulation Editor Margo Balzarini
Back Issues Susan Bohm

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

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

SOCIETY ADDRESSES

Society Business:

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

Memberships and subscriptions

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

Articles for Publication:

Lawrence R. Stark, Editor

The Bunchgrass Historian

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

Current and Back Issues:

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

The Bunchgrass Historian

SW 405 State Street
Pullman, WA 99163

Exploration of the Palouse Country

The Pacific Railroad Expedition of the 1850's

Although residents both pre-historic and historical knew the details of the Palouse county before the 1850s, not until the Pacific Railroad Survey Expeditions of 1853 and 1854 was a full exploration undertaken with the intention of publication of reports for all to read. The leader of the expedition was Isaac I. Stevens, Governor of Washington Territory. He was also the author of the extracts from the Reports that are reprinted here.

The modern reader needs to get his bearings since the place names are not those of today. Today's Rock Lake is called Never Freezing Water, the South Fork of the Palouse is Teenatpanup, Kamiak Butte does not have a name, and even the word Palouse is spelled differently. The reader can undoubtedly reason out the other names and places.

The Report is in four parts, the First and Second trips, the report of James Doty, and the Geographical Memoir.

— *Editor*

The first crossing —

October 31. — We continued to follow the general course of whose banks we were encamped, and after riding eight miles we crossed another small stream called *Snae-peene*, or *Narrow Creek*, and half a mile beyond we beheld an attractive camping ground, it being the one we desired to reach yesterday, but which was represented by Garry to be too far for the day's journey. The stream just mentioned rises in a chain of small lakes south of our last camp. These lakes abound in wild fowl, which at this season, and indeed until the last of November, are very plentiful, and they are therefore much resorted to by the *Spokane* and other Indians. We saw in one of these lakes, surrounded by ducks and geese, a pair of white swans, which remained to challenge our admiration after their companions had been frightened away by our approach.

Garry assured us that there is a remarkable lake called *En-chush-chesh-she-luxum*, or *Never Freezing Water*, about thirty miles to the east of this place. It is much larger than any of the lakes just mentioned, and so completely surrounded by high and precipitous rocks that it is impossible to descend to the water. It is said never to freeze, even in the most severe winters. The Indians believe that it is inhabited by buffalo, elk, deer, and all other kinds of game, which they say may be seen in the clear, transparent element. ...

Our route today has been through a rocky and broken country, and after a march of 32 miles we encamped on a small stream called *En-cha-rae-nae*, flowing from the lake where we last halted, near a number of natural mounds. Here we met with a discharged servant of the *Hudson Bay Company* and his family, on their way to the old *Presbyterian mission* on the *Spokane river*.

November 1. — Our course lay down the valley of the *En-cha-rae-nae*, a rugged way beset with deep clefts in the volcanic rocks. We crossed the *Peluse River* following from the never freezing lake *En-chush-chesh-she-luxum*, and twelve miles from the mouth of the *Peluse*. Four miles from our place of crossing the *Peluse* runs through a deep canyon, surrounded by isolated volcanic buttes, to its junction with the *Snake River*. We met two *Peluse Indians* on the *En-cha-rae-nae*, who informed Garry that there were no Indians at the junction of the *Peluse*. They accompanied us to assist in crossing our animals and baggage. On the *Peluse* we fell in with two lodges of Indians, and saw a large number of horses belonging to another camp just arrived from up the river.

At 2 p.m. we arrived at the mouth of the *Peluse River*, and crossed *Snake River*, we encamped on its southern bank, several *Peluse Indians* accompanying us, and among them a chief from a band but a few miles distant from our camp, *Wi-ti-my-hoy-she*. He exhibited a medal of *Thomas*

Jefferson, dated 1801, given to his grandfather, as he alleges, by Lewis and Clark.

Not having visited them myself, the following description of the falls of the Peluse was kindly furnished me by Mr. Stanley, who saw them in the year 1847.

Falls of the Peluse.

The Peluse River flows over three steppes, each of which is estimated to have an ascent of a thousand feet. The falls descend from the middle of the lower of these steppes. There is no timber along the course of this stream, but a few willows and other bushes; yet the soil is fertile, and the grass nutritious and abundant even in winter. The falls of water, which is about 30 feet wide, cannot be seen from any distant point; for flowing through a fissure in the basaltic rock, portions of which tower above in jagged pinnacles, it suddenly descends some 125 feet into a narrow basin, and thence flows rapidly away through a deep canyon from a point from which the annexed view was sketched. The distance from the falls to Snake River is about nine miles. The valley widens considerably for about a half a mile from the mouth of the Peluse. The home of the Peluse Indians is near this junction, where they devote a good deal of their time to salmon fishing. The salmon ascend to the falls; but the Indians have a legend which tells of the wickedness of the Indians higher up the country, and how the Great Spirit, in his displeasure, places the falls as a barrier to the further ascent of the salmon.

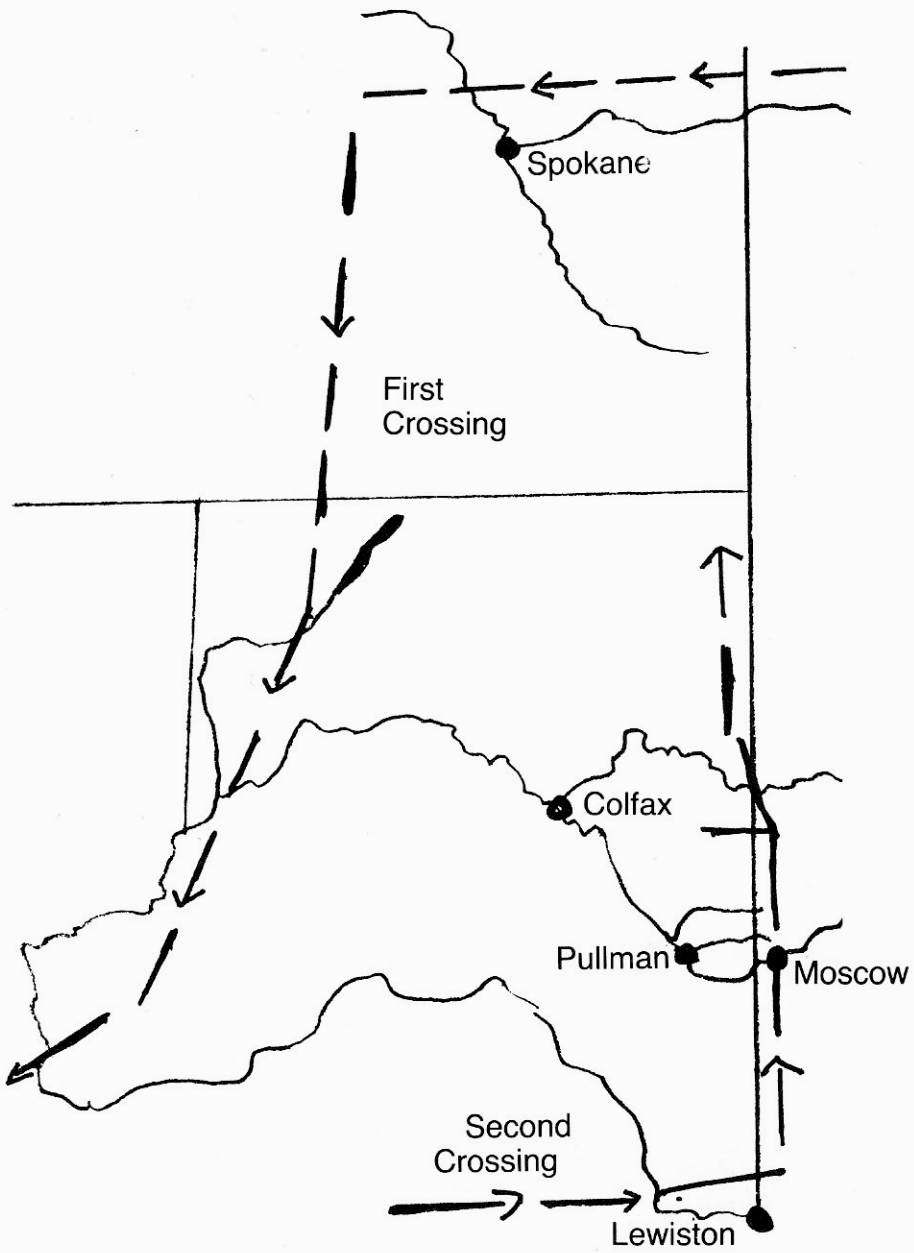


Peace Medal — rediscovered 1964

The second crossing —

Wednesday, June 20. — We moved twenty miles today and camped at a delightful spring, with abundant dry wood near by. The first two miles and a half we went down the Snake River, one mile below, and another on the left bank of the river two and a half miles below our camp. The Indians were collecting their horses to go out the kamas fields northward of Snake River. We then moved up a small tributary of the Snake - the water, at the present time, at the lower portion of it, being simply in pools, or running short distances - and in four miles reached the table-land; water, and wood and grass being abundant the last two miles. And here I was astonished, not simply at the luxuriant of the grass, but the richness of the soil; and I will again remind the reader that it does not follow that because the grass is luxuriant that the country is not arable. In a mile and a half we reached the divide separating the water of the Snake from those of the Peluse, which divide, so far as the eye could reach, is nearly parallel to the Snake and about four miles from it. In two miles and a half we came to a long and narrow lake; fields of kamas being in view for a long distance. There is running water in the lake, which, however, from time to time, sinks into the ground and rises again. Three miles and a half further we came again the running water, with luxuriant cottonwood. This connects with the lake before referred to, and here is a most excellent camping place. In a mile and a half, again, wood and water. In two miles and a half we came to a low divide, and in two more miles reached our camp. On our left we saw banks of Indians digging kamas, some three miles distant, who were afterward ascertained to be twelve lodges of Peluses, under their chief Quilatose. I will again say, we have been astonished to-day as the luxuriance of the grass and the richness of the soil. The whole view presents to the eye a vast bed of flowers in all their varied beauty. The country is a rolling table-land, and the soil like that of the prairies of Illinois.

Thursday, June 21. — We moved today seventeen miles, and encamped at the right bank of the main Peluse River. At our last night's camp the pines of the spurs of the Bitter Root were in view, extending to within a mile or a mile and a half of us. We skirted or passed through these pines during this day's journey. The whole country to the westward, as far as the eye could reach, was an open plain, the skies clear and the atmosphere transparent; I say again, the whole country was, apparently, exceedingly rich and luxuriant. I interrogated very closely my pack-master, Mr. Higgins, in reference to the character of the country westward, for he had crossed it on two different lines between our present trail and that from the mouth of the Peluse; and he assured me that the country which my own eyes saw today, and had seen yesterday, was precisely the same country as



Routes of the Stevens Party

that found on the westward lines. Pyramid Butte was also in view to-day, as it had been yesterday. We took its bearings with a view of laying it down on our map.

But to resume: in 3¼ miles we reached the extensive kamas grounds of the Nez Perces. Here were six hundred Nez Perces — men, women, and children — with at least two thousand horses — gathering the kamas. So abundant is this valuable and nutritious root, that it requires simply four day's of labor for them to gather sufficient for their year's use. In 2¼ miles further on we struck the great Nez Perces trail, coming from Lapwai, a much larger and more used trail than the one we had followed from Red Wolf's ground. In one mile we came to water and cotton-wood; pines were seen to the eastward of us, about a mile distant. In 3½ miles we crossed a divide covered with pine. A most excellent camp is to be found one mile before reaching this divide. In 4½ miles, passing over a rolling, well grassed, and arable country, we reached a second divide, also covered with pine; and in two miles more we made our camp on the Peluse. Between the two divides a trail branches off the Spokane country. The kamas



*“Source of the Peluse”
(Summit of Kamiak Butte)*

grounds on our route are watered by several tributaries, which flow into the Teenat-pan-up branch of the Peluse. Before descending into the valley of the Peluse, I ascended a very high hill on the last divide, and westward of our trail, where I had a most distinct and interesting view of the sources of the Peluse. So much was I impressed with it, that I directed Mr. Doty to carefully take notes and lay down the river on his map. It has its source in the main ridge of the Bitter Root, sixty or eighty miles distant from the hill where we observed it, and flows in a nearly straight course through a valley some twenty miles wide, bearing north 77° east, through a country densely timbered with pine. There is probably a pass to the Bitter Root valley, by the line of the Peluse. I will remark, again, that the country in this day's travel has been of the same general character as that of yesterday. The bottom land of the Peluse has great resources. It is very heavily timbered with pine, with but little underbrush; and the country throughout is open, the grazing being most admirable. We had a view down the Peluse for some thirty or forty miles, and the timber was apparently as large and abundant at the lower end of the valley, as at our present camp. Many trees are to be seen three and four feet through, with a proportionate height.



Mouth of the Palouse

Narrative of 1853

James Doty

... after making the necessary arrangements with Lieutenant Mullan, at Cantonment Stevens, he (Doty) left on the 19th September, pursued my trail of 1853, over the Coeur d'Alene mountains to the Coeur d'Alene mission, and then separated from my trail to take one more direct to the Walla Walla, south of Coeur d'Alene Lake.

Crossing the Coeur d'Alene River about sixty miles east of the crossing of the main train, and above the lake of the same name, he passed through prairie for four miles, south of the river; he then ascended a high ridge for a mile and passed over a rolling country, with scattering pine timber, seven miles, to a stream flowing into the lake and running through a fertile valley.

Leaving the south end of the lake, he went up a narrow valley, up a gently rising slope, for four miles, and ten miles more through rolling country, sparsely timbered with pine, little undergrowth, and plenty of grass. Then came a larger prairie, stretched away to the west beyond view; its soil being a black sandy loam. South of this is another high ridge, of six hundred feet elevation, and an easy ascent for a mile. From its summit the plain was seen toward the west and south, bound only by the horizon, and the distant spurs of the Blue Mountains. Several small streams run from the foot of these ridges to the west, forming by their junctions the south branches of the Coeur d'Alene.

For twenty-two miles to the southwest of this ridge he met neither wood nor water, though he crossed the dry bed of a stream at about half that distance, striking the main western branch of the Peluse, which is thinly bordered with pines, cotton-wood, and willows; it was there twenty feet wide and one foot deep, flowing over a pebbly bottom. The soil of its valley is a rich loam, the valley narrow and bordered by basaltic precipices. Forty-nine miles further, keeping more to the west, he struck the Peluse four miles above its mouth. The longest interval between water was eighteen miles, and the country gradually becomes more broken and rocky, in following down the stream from the north, a branch was crossed fifty feet wide and two feet deep, with a valley like that of the other branches.

Just north of the first branch of the Peluse is a lofty hill, called Pyramid Butte, towering high above the prairie.

Geographical Memoir

The Snake River itself has consider tributaries: first the Peluse which consists of several branches, one coming from the north, having its rise in the central portion of the Great Plains of the Columbia; but the main branch comes from the main divide over the Bitter Root mountains, flows nearly due west for 130 miles, and joins the other branch of the Peluse twelve miles above its mouth. In the narrative a circumstantial account is given of the great fall of the Peluse, which is an extraordinary place for salmon, and therefore a great resort for the Indians.

That portion of the Great Plains lying east of the main Columbia, and which may be regarded as bounded on the north by the Spokane, and on the east by the foothills of the Bitter Root mountains, is, for the most part, well watered and well grassed. The eastern half of this portion is exceedingly well adapted to agricultural purposes. The various streams — The Peluse, the Kamas Prairie creek of the Coeur d'Alene, the Spokane and Coeur d'Alene rivers — are well timbered with pine, and numerous rivulets and springs are found through that portion of the country, facilitating the progress of settlements, and rendering the whole at once available to the agriculturalist. Indeed, the whole of the western slopes of the Bitter Root mountains are densely timbered with pine, spruce, larch, cedar, and other trees.



More Reminiscences of a Pedagogue

by
S.C. Roberts

For more than half a century now, Colfax has maintained its supremacy among the score of Whitman County towns, in trade, wealth and politics. For some years the national census gave it first in the nation for its size, on per capita wealth. It is also true, according to the same authority, that for some time Whitman County ranked second in the nation in the value of its agricultural production. Many men I have known will, there, have risen from small beginnings to affluence in business and professional life, in the favorable opportunities of town and country in those early days. And, sad to say, many of those fortunate men later lost their wealth by speculation in enterprises with which they were unfamiliar. Mining projects were especially tempting, and I can tell many a tale involving the names of well-to-do, venturesome men who lost all in such speculation. I shall speak of one such instance only. In the early days of the Klondike, Alaska, gold rush, Bert Hargrave, an expert accountant with marked ability as literary writer and music composer, Dr. Harvey, easily the leading physician and surgeon of Colfax, and Henry Sullivan, for many years judge of the superior court for Whitman County, formed a copartnership and joined the procession for the Klondike placer fields. Harvey, two years later, was the first to return, bringing harrowing tales of hardship and suffering in that inhospitable venture. On the day of his return, I asked about Hargrave to learn that he had not seen him for a long time. He saw Sullivan the day he left Dawson, he said, driving a team of mules with a load of poles through the main street of the town. He was drawing ten dollars a day at the job to get money enough to come home. "Once," he said, "we three, together with six other men, on our way to a reportedly rich new field, were rafting our supplies down the Yukon River. The water was low and there were many rapids and whirlpools, in one of which our raft upset and all our stuff rolled into the river. After desperate efforts, we had collected most of our effects and had spread them on the rocky shore to dry. There were some sacks of dried prunes, our only fruit, and some of dried potatoes. To save these, I was opening the sacks and spreading the contents on sheets of cedar bark, when I came upon two small raw potatoes. They were the first raw vegetables I had seen for many months and I never saw any thing in the way of food so tempting, and I did about the meanest thing I ever did in my life. Watching my chance, I surrepticiously slipped the precious

morsels into my pocket, sneaked away over a nearby hillock and ate both those potatoes raw. I have done many things in my life I wish I had not done, but I never experienced a more overwhelming sense of downright meanness than I did in facing those poor fellows who didn't have a chance even to look at those delectable potatoes."

The town of Colfax owed its location, doubtless, to the fact that there is the confluence of the two largest streams in Whitman County. They would furnish power for milling wheat and lumber for a county roughly sixty miles square, an area larger than the state of Delaware. With the county seat quite a distance off center, and with Colfax politicians not always disposed to be fair to other town communities, there have been numerous attempts at county division; but such efforts have come to nothing for lack of agreement on the question of selecting a county seat for the proposed division. And so Colfax always wins, and remains the capital of the county. But few who see the town today can have any notion of the labor and expense necessary to build the town. When I first knew it in 1883, its main and only street running north and south, was but a link in the stage and freighting road from Walla Walla to Colville. Crossing the South Palouse River over a low-water bridge, built on heavy logs without trusses, it followed the meanderings of that stream high way through the town before turning into line with main street. This was necessary to avoid a high



Colfax, Ca. 1890

hill which has been entirely removed in straightening the street and cutting down building lots along the east side of the street. Another log bridge crossed a great gully crossing the street near the town center, while still a third, and the largest such bridge, crossed the North Palouse River near its confluence with the South branch. The north half of the town site was cut into intricate figures in islets, bayous and bogs, due to the meanderings of the river. Many of those channels, some of them ten to fifteen feet deep, have been filled, first with saw dust and then covered with five or six feet of earth mostly hauled from considerable distances. Three times in fifty years, the entire town has been inundated and greatly damaged when the spring flood waters of both rivers chance to occur at the same time. The built up lands I have just described, now house the main residential section of the town. I know of no other town of its size in which it has been necessary to move so much earth to make way for its building.

Added to all this, heavy sacrifices had been required in securing right of way for the railroad through the town, and the heavy losses entailed by the removal of business to Plainville and back as I have already said. All these extraordinary undertakings had placed Colfax at great disadvantage as compared with other towns of the county, when the hard times of '93 came on. With the school, every other enterprise suffered. Wheat went as low as seventeen cents a bushel. Cows sold at sixteen dollars, while good saddle horses sold at auction for as little as fifty cents each.



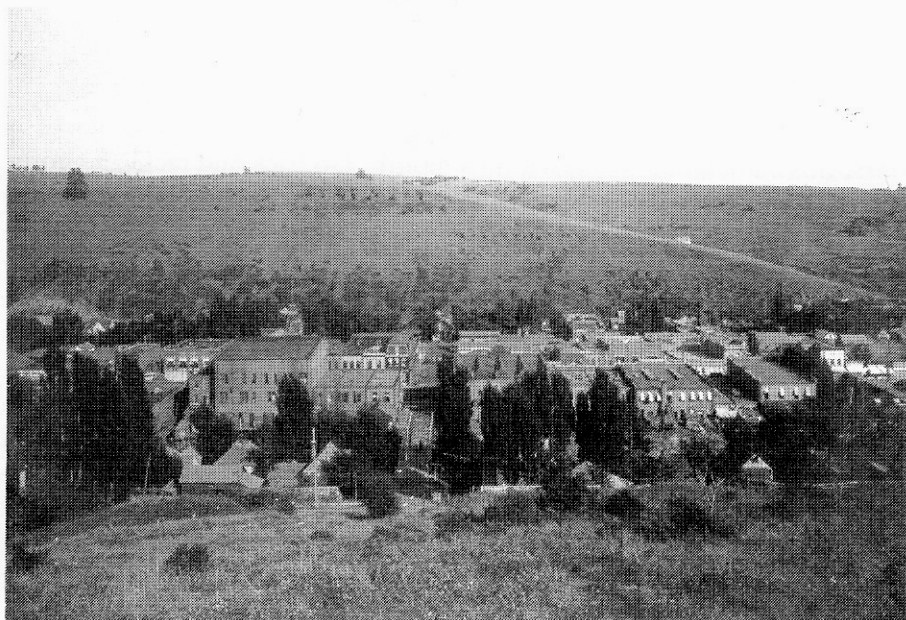
Colfax, Ca. 1900

But perhaps the most serious factor in the depression of 1893, was the loss of the grain crop that year. The yield was exceptionally good. Much of the grain had been harvested, threshed and piled in the fields as was the custom, to be hauled to market later. But before the harvesting was over, excessive rains set in and continued until the uncut fields could not be harvested, for the ground was so soft that even the sacked grain could not be hauled, and so was left to rot in the fields. Portions of it could be used only for feeding and industrial purposes; and so, at the prevailing low prices, the crop was almost a total loss.

The day I closed the business connected with my part in building Colfax College, at the Second National Bank, two incidents occurred there which were typical of scores of others at that time. While I was in conference with Mr. Coolidge, the president of the bank, Mr. Ben Manchester, an extensive farmer from south of Colfax, came into the office, and, in a breaking voice, began, "Coolidge, I'm done for. I'm here to turn over to you all I have, if it will buy from you freedom from my debts. I can carry on no longer." At once, reassuringly came the reply, "No more of that kind of talk, Ben. I can't take your land. If I should take over all such cases as yours, this bank would close within a month. Go back and tackle it another year. The bank will continue to carry you, and if you fail then, there won't be many others to carry on." So Manchester went back with the result that in less than three years, he succeeded in paying out completely. Before the close of that conversation, a stranger came in. He was a middle aged, sandy complexioned wiry fellow, who, when asked to present his business, said about as follows: "I'm looking for a piece of land to rent. I'm just from Missouri. My family, besides my wife, is a boy of seventeen and three girls. We have enough to grub-stake us for a year. I need land and equipment, Can you do any thing for me?" Replying at once, Coolidge said, "I believe you're just the man I'm looking for. The bank has just been obliged to take over a half section of new land up near Rosalia. It was all broken up last spring and will be ready for seeding this fall. You may have the land, we will furnish everything including seed, mules and implements, for half the crop in the warehouse. After a visit to the land, the deal was closed and in less than three years the man from Missouri paid for the land in full, including all the equipment. That was R. J. Fisk, whose children attended Colfax schools, and later the State College.

A Mr. Gordon had planted and brought to bearing forty acres of prunes on Spring Flat, midway between Colfax and Pullman. Although there were at that time several large prune drying plants in the county, conditions were such that prunes could not be marketed with any profit. An eastern buyer took over Gordon's crop on the trees at eight dollars per

ton. About the close of the prune harvest, I made a trip east, stopping an hour for train connection at Minneapolis. A short distance from the depot, I noticed a large banner sign advertising "California Blue Plums. Ten Cents a Dozen." Long lines of customers were waiting the service of a dozen or more clerks. A closer inspection revealed the fact that those "California Blue Plums" were none other than prunes from Gordon's orchard, as shown by the box labels bearing his name.



Colfax, Ca. 1900