

Bunchgrass Historian

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SPRING, 1973

JAMES A. PERKINS

*Co-Founder and First Permanent Resident
of Colfax, W. T.*

By Roy Milton Chatters

The life of James Allen Perkins, first citizen of Colfax, Washington Territory, in many ways illustrates the history and growth of Whitman County. Three generations of his family have lived on the land he claimed where the north and south forks of the Palouse river meet. With the selection of the Perkins property, including the 1870 log cabin and the well-preserved and architecturally interesting 1884 Victorian house, as a National Historic Place in December, 1972, Whitman County has a landmark of documented and representative significance. Therefore, it is fitting that a sketch of Mr. Perkins' life be presented in the first issue of the **Bunchgrass Historian**.

Louis Perkins and Mrs. Catherine (Perkins) Stoltz, grandchildren of James Perkins, in addition to Mrs. Irene Weitze*, have generously provided me with valuable genealogical materials, some of which has been



*Residing in Salem, Oregon; Bellingham, Washington, and Colfax, Washington, respectively.

Dr. Chatters retired as a nuclear engineer from Washington State University last year. He is a collector of old books and manuscripts.

Bunchgrass Historian

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Willamette Valley. Later moving to Benton County, Oregon, where they remained until 1861. In that year the family again moved, this time to Walla Walla County near Waitsburg, Washington, where Joel engaged in farming. James took a pre-emption claim adjoining his father's land, but later sold his right and purchased the land upon which the town of Huntsville, Washington, was located.

In July, 1870, in company with Thomas J. Smith, Perkins settled on land at the junction of the north and south forks of the Palouse River. As no United States survey had yet been made, they decided between themselves where each one's property boundaries would be established. Perkins took that part of the valley lying north of the present Last Street in Colfax and Smith took the south portion.

The site was first called Belleville, claimed by some historians to have been named for Belle Plaine, Illinois, where James A. was born on September 7, 1841. James' wife, in a short paper on pioneering days in the Palouse stated that he had named it for a former sweetheart whose first name was "Belle". The name did not persist, being replaced by "Colfax" in honor of Schuyler Colfax, Vice President (1869-73) during President U. S. Grant's first administration.

Shortly after arriving in the valley, Perkins and Smith collected logs for their cabins and put up about thirty tons of wild hay for the winter (quite possibly bunchgrass). Before the first cabin was completed Smith decided to withdraw from the venture. He took his logs and moved to Union Flat. Thus Perkins was left alone except for the men helping build his cabin.

incorporated into a detailed "family tree" by Mrs. Minnie (Perkins) Tower. From her research we learn that the first member of the family in America was Nicholas Perkins who was born at Bradford, England in 1572. He settled in Virginia and from his union with Jane Ironmonger the subject of this history is a direct descendant. It is worthy to note that James' paternal grandfather, Jesse, was born in Albemarle County, Virginia, about 1780. (Albemarle County was the home of Thomas Jefferson, third U.S. President, as well as of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, famed for the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-06).

In 1852, Joel, father of James A., and his family crossed the plains, the trip to the Northwest by ox-team took six months from their home in Illinois. Upon their arrival, they settled in the vicinity of Oregon City, in the

Stephen Allured Jr., artist to whom the Society is deeply indebted for the **Bunchgrass Historian's** masthead, is a member of Washington State University's publications staff.

An interesting anecdote about the building of the Perkins cabin was told some years ago by Mrs. Mary White, the first white woman to have her home in what later became Colfax. She related that in September 1870, she with her husband and children emigrated from Umatilla County, Oregon, to the Palouse country. As they descended the south hill of Colfax and came down toward what is now Main Street she and her husband separated, he to explore in one direction and she down the valley floor. As she and her oldest boy, whom she had on horseback with her, proceeded along they heard the stroke of an axe on wood. They continued in the direction of the sound and came upon James Perkins and an assistant who were getting out logs for Perkins' cabin. Mrs. White said that Perkins was quite startled when she appeared. He returned with Mrs. White and her son to the camp site where she had left her husband and later Perkins served as their host while they camped at the site of his log cabin. The Whites remained and helped to build Colfax.

This log cabin has played an important role in the history of Whitman County. The first Republican convention in the county was held in it in 1872. The Democrats held their first meeting in the saw mill which was built in 1871 by Perkins, H. S. Hollingsworth and A. Cox. Perkins and his bride, Sara Jane Ewart, spent their honeymoon in the cabin following their wedding on June 6, 1873 and Minnie Perkins, their first child, began life in the cabin on April 18, 1874.

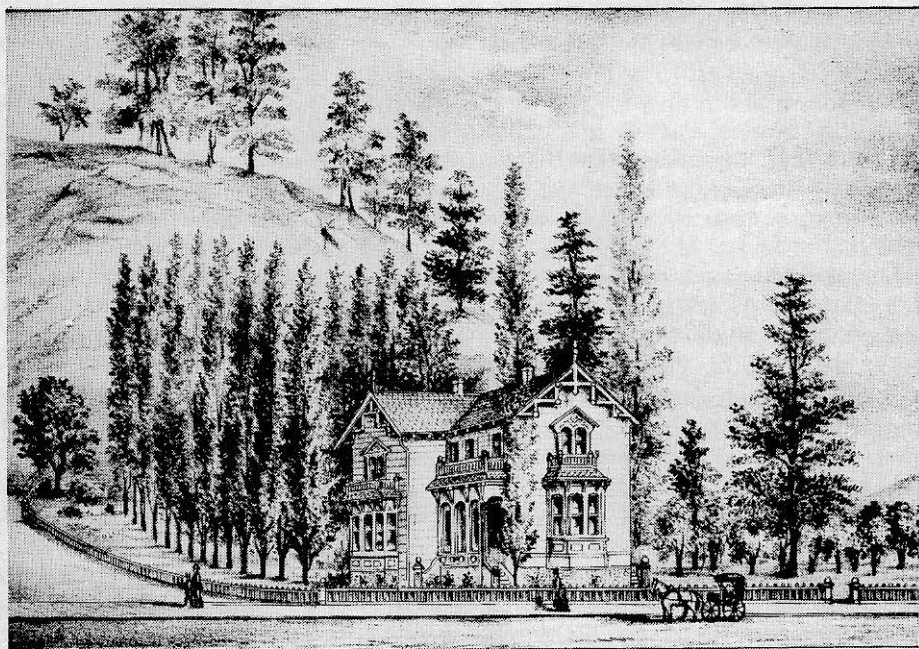
Perkins' wedding in 1873 to the daughter of Captain James Ewart is described by Mrs. Perkins in a paper presented before the Colfax "Athenaeum Club" in 1898. She stated that the wedding was held in the schoolhouse which had been thoroughly cleaned and fresh sawdust from the mill put on the floor by the bridegroom to protect her wedding gown. "A large concourse of people awaited the arrival of the bridal party. Some had traveled a portion of the night, many coming more than twenty miles in wagons or on horseback. At high noon, the contracting parties appeared, attended by an M.D. as best man (Dr. P. D. Bunnell) and the daughter of a prominent farmer as bridesmaid (Nettie Taber)." After the wedding they rode to their first home, the log cabin.

The following day, the bride's eighteenth birthday, the newlyweds rode the nine miles on horseback to her parents' home for the traditional celebration with their friends and relatives.

Throughout the remainder of his life, Mr. Perkins played an active part in the development of Whitman County and in the political affairs of the county and state. The first city election was held in 1879 and he was elected to the city council and his father-in-law to the post of Mayor. Perkins later was elected five times as the mayor of Colfax (1882, '83, '84, '85 and '91). Also in 1879, he represented Whitman County in the territorial legislature. He served as a delegate to territorial conventions, was chairman of the Republican central committee for the county and was a territorial committee member. He was a delegate to the national convention which nominated James A. Garfield for the presidency as well as being a delegate-at-large to the national Republican convention which met in 1892 at Minneapolis to nominate a successor to President Harrison. In 1892, he was urged to allow his name to be proposed for the governorship by the Republicans but declined. The next year he refused to allow his name to be presented to the state legislature for a position as U.S. Senator. He played a prominent role in having Colfax designated as the county seat. In 1894, he was made chairman of the local branch of a newly formed Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho Bureau of Immigration.

Perkins had many business interests, including a part in the establishment of the first saw mill in Colfax. The September 29, 1877 issue of the **Palouse Gazette** listed J. A. Perkins as a notary public and dealer in real estate. He was active in banking, having in 1881 purchased the Bank of Colfax which he owned and operated until 1886 when A. L. Miles became a partner. Miles was succeeded by O. E. Williams in 1890. Perkins was also president of the Bank of Pullman when it commenced business in July, 1887. He was one of the incorporators of the Washington and Idaho Railroad Company and served as the real estate agent for the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company and the Northern Pacific Railway. The latter he represented from the time it first put land on the market.

Active in civic affairs, he served as a trustee of Colfax Academy, later Colfax College, was for many years president of the Whitman County Pioneer Association and was much sought after as a public speaker. One such occasion was the welcoming at Colfax in 1899 of volunteer soldiers of the Spanish-American War. An historian of the time said that Mr. Perkins gave a "timely and pathetic address."



MR. J. A. PERKINS' RESIDENCE,
COLFAX, W. T.

From lithograph owned by Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Hickman, Colfax

Kamiak Butte, site of a wooded park so prized by Palouse country citizens, was named by James Perkins in honor of Chief Kamiaken who led a band of braves at the time the whites first settled the Palouse hills. He was a leader among those Indians who defeated Colonel Steptoe in 1858 near Rosalia. Mr. Perkins thought it no more than proper that Kamiaken's name should be applied to a butte as had that of the man he had helped to defeat.



Views of Perkins House — Summer, 1972



—Bill Walter photos

Sara Jane (Ewart) Perkins occupied a place of respect in Colfax and shared her husband's life for nearly fifty years. As did Mr. Perkins, she had a great interest in the history of Colfax and Whitman County. She bore four children, Minnie B., Myrtle M., Stella and Sumner E. Mrs. Perkins survived her husband by fifteen years, passing away on May 7, 1935.

Following his death on June 1, 1920, the **Colfax Gazette** eulogized him in these terms:

"Identified with the business, civic and social life of the city since its very inception, Mr. Perkins has always been recognized as a man of sterling integrity, upright in business and unquestioned in his dealings with all men. Although he has participated in a great variety of activities and has been subjected to the searchlight of stubbornly contested political campaigns, no strain or blemish has ever been found. He can be counted as one of the truly great and honored men of the state."

What greater reward can any man hope for in return for a life of labor than to be honored and respected by those whom he has helped to build a city.

Through the efforts of the Whitman County Historical Society the homes of James and Sara Perkins have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The restoration by the Society of the log cabin to its original simplicity and the Victorian house to its former elegance will, we hope, serve to further honor these pioneers.

(Perkins family history continued in the next issue of the **Bunchgrass Historian**].

Summer Fun of Years Gone By . . .

By B. LeRoy Davidson

A special event of Whitman county summers during the twenties and thirties was the Boone picnic. As important as the Fourth of July and falling shortly thereafter, before the busiest days of the farm harvest. The **Pullman Herald**, July 23, 1926, reported that "Seventy-two automobiles carried upwards of 250 persons to the picnic held on Union Flat to celebrate the 71st birthday of D. W. Boone, pioneer of the area . . . who settled . . . in 1877 . . . and has resided continuously since. The seven acre timber claim—the oak grove—where the picnic was held is about two-thirds hardwood, being one of the few hardwood groves in the community." The family geneology compiled by descendants tell us the picnics commenced earlier but that the first one to be held in the grove was in 1921 and that every year the crowds grew larger and larger. A long table was a permanent structure in the grove, and it became longer and longer. The Herald reports "a bounteous basket dinner," and published a public invitation to these events, held the Sunday nearest July 19th, the actual birthday. A program was presented and a ball game usually took place simultaneously, across the fence in a pasture.

It was truly one of the BIG social events of the season. The largest crowd was estimated at over 1,000, and a photograph of one of the gatherings showed that not all came by auto; one lady is arriving on horseback.

These may have been the first "Pioneer Picnics."

Do you have a similar story to tell? Send it to the editor.



Boone Picnic — 1929

The man in front with the white beard is George Boone; at George's right stands Daniel Wright Boone; Mrs. D. W. Boone stands at his right.

Founding of the Present Society

By Norma McGregor

Chartered in August 1972, the Whitman County Historical Society can trace its origin to a meeting held earlier in the year on March 15. Called by the Regional Planning Director for Whitman County, Jose Urcia, a group of about 30 people responded to an appeal to form a task force to conduct a survey of the county's historic sites. Mr. Urcia stressed the need for citizen participation not only in the preservation of our unique cultural history, but also in the protection of significant and representative examples of our county's land forms. To illustrate this point, Urcia described the plans of the Whitman County Park Board for the development and preservation of recently acquired property at Elberton into a traditional village along the lines of a classic farm community. The area, thus restored, would provide not only a recreation resource but also an educational demonstration of the region's past land use.

Dr. Herman Deutsch and Dr. David Stratton spoke about the Federal Program for Historic Preservation and explained how the law is administered under the Parks and Recreation Commission, with Federal matching funds available for preserving sites that could qualify for the National Register of Historic Properties. Suggestions offered by the group were as varied as the Bootleggers' Cave on Rock Lake, and the Covered Bridge at Green Hollow.

Before they adjourned the group selected temporary officers in Mrs. Sherman McGregor of Pullman, Chairman, and Mr. Roger Rossebo, director of the Three Forks Pioneer Village outside of Pullman, as Vice Chairman.

On Aug. 13, 1972, at a meeting at Mrs. McGregor's house, a small and dedicated group formed itself into two committees: one, an organizational committee to make plans for the formation of a historical society was headed by Mrs. Lawrence Hickman of Colfax. The other committee was to begin preliminary work on the historic site survey and was led by Dr. Roy M. Chatters. Present at this formative meeting were: Dr. Herman Deutsch, Dr. Albert W. Thompson, Mr. Oscar Gladish, Mr. Henry Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Delbert Kammerzell, Mr. and Mrs. Dale Curtis, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Hickman, Mr. Frank N. Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Harms, Dr. Roy Chatters, Mr. Roger Rossebo and Mr. and Mrs. Sherman McGregor. Also contributing, but not present at the meeting, were: Mrs. Barbara Butts, Mrs. Margaret Clow, Mrs. Dorothy Matson, Dr. David Stratton and Mr. Lawrence Welle.

The productive session saw the articulation of goals: to collect and preserve the historical record of Whitman County, to establish a living museum and an active historical program that would provide a vital resource for public recreation, education and historical conservation. Finally, a delegation was formed to visit a potential historic site that had just come up for sale: the old Perkins homestead in Colfax.

Mr. Lawrence Hickman volunteered to represent the group legally with his first contribution the preparing of papers of incorporation in time for the Society's debut at the Palouse Empire Fair of September 1972.

The Incorporation ceremony itself took place in Mr. Hickman's law office on August 29, 1972. The incorporators, who became the officers and the first board

Mrs. McGregor holds the distinction of being the Society's first president. Born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, at marriage she joined a pioneer Eastern Washington family. Mrs. McGregor presently lives in Pullman during the school year but spends vacation times at the old family home in Hooper.

of directors were: Norma McGregor, president; Roger Rossebo, vice president; Evelyn Hickman, recording secretary; Roy M. Chatters, treasurer; and Alfred B. Butler, Pullman; Frank N. Johnson, Pullman; Neita Curtis, Thornton; Eugene Harms, Pullman, and Henry Smith, Rosalia, members of the board.

Buoyed by the public expression of support shown at the Fair, and its growing assets of just under \$1,000, the Society took a three-month option to buy the Perkins property. At this same time Dr. Roy Chatters completed the application nominating the Perkins property for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The house, unmodified since it was built in the Eighties, and the pioneer log cabin that preceded it as the dwelling place of the founder of Colfax, are situated on an acre and a half of wooded hillside and represent unusual qualities of historic and architectural significance that are worthy of preservation.

A fund drive was then initiated with the mailing of 2,000 letters to rural residents of the county. This effort was followed by an appeal to city and townspeople and to the Friends of the Library. Even before the Society was incorporated, it got its first financial contribution and its first member when Mrs. Nancy Startin of Hooper sent a check with a letter of encouragement to the organizing group.

Good newspaper coverage in the **Colfax Gazette**, the **Pullman Herald**, and the **WSU Daily Evergreen** helped the promotion and brought the news of the Society's activities to the attention of readers beyond the county. Mr. George H. Gannon, a former Whitman county businessman, and his wife, Gertrude Bryan Gannon, offered to lend the Society the purchase price of the property, at no interest rate for ten years, so that the money collected during the fund-raising drive could be used to begin the restoration project.

On January 13, 1973, transfer of ownership was completed, making the Perkins house the home of the Whitman County Historical Society. Meanwhile, word had been received from the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C., that the Perkins house in Colfax, Whitman County, had, indeed, been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In this classification it joins such notable historic landmarks as Independence Hall, and Fort Vancouver and the Pike Place Market District in our own State of Washington.

More than 300 persons and business establishments in Whitman County, other states and Canada, have become members of the Society since its incorporation. Of these, 99 are \$100 Charter memberships which are available only this first year of the Society's existence. Launched on a healthy life-time career, the young Whitman County Historical Society hopes to celebrate its first birthday on August 31, 1973, with a membership of 500 people.

The Editor of the **Bunchgrass Historian** will welcome stories, photographs, sketches and line drawings for consideration to be included in future issues of this bulletin. Send them to June Crithfield, Route 1, Colton, Washington 99113.

Mr. and Mrs. G. Gannon Friends of the Society

George H. Gannon, a native of Pullman and a graduate of Washington State University in 1915, has always been vitally interested in public issues and has held numerous positions of responsibility during his lifetime. He is manager of Yakima Chief Ranches at Yakima, Wash., a position he has held since 1943.

Mrs. Gannon is the daughter of Dr. E. A. Bryan, a former president of Washington State College. A most gracious lady.

The Gannons have shown their continued interest in Whitman county in their generous offer to aid in the efforts of the Whitman County Historical Society to preserve and honor the heritage of the county.

Mr. and Mrs. Gannon presently divide their time between Yakima, Wash., and Hillsborough, Calif.

Lines in Praise of Farmington

By Mary McGregor, at age 19

On this cloud-peeled morning
not even physics' theories could explain
the damp, awakening brilliance.
Today I feel the need to pop
the nylon zippers of my soul
and go puddle-hopping
in the little town of my choice.

"Farmington," said the boy in the new
red Wildcat Buick, "God—why here?"

Explain the vacuum of quiet—
my heart's restorer—to one
who yearns for a city-people.

What would I think
if the weather-soaked old
house with the chartreuse
stained glass windows and brownness of
the first lace curtains
or the ransacked hotel, with the
caved-in sides, that my father tells
well-when-I-was-young stories about—
if this were my home-cell?

You've got to know the lonely,
pinched heart of the city
to want to escape by giving kazoo
concerts to a long-dead audience
in the lobby of the Farmington Hotel.

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Mary McGregor is a nursing student at WSU. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Sherman McGregor.

'New' Historical Society Not the First

By **Thelma Kay Miller**

Today's Whitman County Historical Society is not the first, for there was an historical society in Whitman county forty-four years ago.

Organized in 1929 by Daisy Harper Sanders, the Whitman County Interstate Museum and Historical Society was housed in the old English College building. Mrs. Sanders who had helped care for Mr. and Mrs. English when they were too old to be alone, was a dedicated worker. She said, "The Historical Society should be a monument to Mr. and Mrs. English as their Baptist Church school, established in 1878 at Colfax, was the first college north of the Snake river and west of the Rockies."

In 1934, Simon Dreifus, mayor of Colfax, wrote a letter of recognition for Daisy Sanders, president and active head of the Historical Society, for collecting valuable historical mementoes and records.

The Historical Society was sponsored by the Washington State Grange and each Pomona Grange as evidenced by letters written by O. E. Barbee, Master of Pomona No. 2, 1934, and Ervin E. King, Office of Master, Seattle, Wash. The Grange appointed an historian to gather stories of pioneer families and institutions. The material was to be stored in the museum library.

Members of various service clubs solicited material for the museum, and several Colfax High School students worked evenings sorting and labeling antique objects.

Members of the Historical Society put on a play to raise funds for the organization and a banquet was once given to raise money, at which reportedly the pigeons that inhabited the attic of the college building were served as a delicacy.

Various rooms of the building were used as the museum. The reception room housed Professor English's library of books. Among them was a set of "Norse Legends" which were leather bound with hand tooled designs. This set was a translation of the legends and had come from the Vatican.

The hall was the historical library with magazines, pamphlets, and old books which were sorted and classified as time and crew permitted. Two of the first floor rooms were used to display a variety of acquisitions. Members helped to catalogue and set up separate displays from the Yukon Expedition; stuffed birds, birds' nests and eggs, an ostrich, a mounted moose head, deer heads, old dishes, furniture, human hair wreaths, an oxen yoke, spinning wheels, guns, branding irons, a hand powered grist mill, grandstones, harness, enlarged pictures of pioneers, and one of the first cars built in the United States.

The car was built by Mr. Carley who owned the Iron Works at Colfax. Mr. Franklin, who built the first Franklin car, came from the East to learn from Mr. Carley how to build a differential so the wheel on the outside would turn faster than the wheel on the inside. It was made of brass. The car was taken to the old English College in the late twenties. Dell Mitchell of Steptoe, son of Dr. Mitchell, bought the car. Dell got it a second time from Andy Bacon after the engine had been removed. Mr. Mitchell still has it in his possession and intends to restore it as time permits.

Thelma Kay Miller is a native of Colfax, Washington, a retired school teacher and the author of **GRASS IS GOLD.**

The roster of members of the first Historical Society hung near the entrance of the auditorium on the second floor. It contained about 100 names. Some were assigned as paid up members and some as working members. The working members were designated as inside and outside crews. A partial list of members follows:

Daisy Sanders, President (her parents came by wagon train from Missouri to Oregon in 1850 and to Whitman county in 1870.)

Harry Sever, Resident Director (in charge college farm, orchard, and gardens.)

Roy Dayton (plowed, harrowed, and cultivated the 10 acres of land.)

Clara Sever, Resident Director of the Museum (housekeeper and cook for the work crews.)

Vern Maler

Joe Charbonneau, cut wood (he was the great grandson of Sacajawea.)

Oliver Hall, came to Colfax in 1877 where his father opened the first wagon shop north of the Snake river in Eastern Washington. Oliver made wooden pumps used in the shallow wells of that day. He shipped the first carload of pumps over the N.P. Railroad and later a carload of sleighs.

Hattie Hunt

Mrs. Melrose

Effie Phillips

Millie Mitchell

Mr. and Mrs. LeRoy LaFollette

Leo and Richard Reimer

Rose Freeman Jensen

Rev. L. E. Coatney

Frank Marlo

Gordon McBean

Anna Heidenreich

Lillie Harper Hibler

Della Riggs

Myrtle Perkins Schreiber

Mrs. Sumner Perkins

Rev. and Mrs. Lew Brown

Dale Enos

Creg (?) Mesick

Jimmie Harper

Richard Sever

Emma Freeman Leach

Minnie Perkins Tower

Sam Merry

Mrs. Behar

Rev. Milo Goss

"Jap" LaFollette

Gilbert McIntyre

Katie S. King

The museum artifacts were moved some years later to the Calvert Chopped Feed Mill at Albion for storage. But someone broke in and took some of the biographical material so the James family and relatives of Florida Hill took some of the things to the Washington State University. Mrs. Harry Sanders, daughter-in-law of Daisy Sanders, gave two ledgers from the English College to the archives at the university.

DID YOU KNOW THAT . . .

A weekly newspaper called the **Boomerang** was published at Palouse in 1888.

There was at one time a brick kiln at Uniontown.

A fort was built just south of Pine City in 1877.

Granite for the Portland customs house came from Granite Point in Whitman County.

Robert Collins' home north of the Y at the top of the Lewiston grade was once a stage coach stop.

History of the Onecho Bible Church

By Pearl Rubin

A rural community church outside an incorporated town is a rarity these days. Whitman county is fortunate in having three.

The Selbu Lutheran church located south of Lacrosse, the Country Bible church near Dusty, and the Onecho Bible church located 12 miles south of Colfax.

In 1876, English farmers of the Methodist faith first settled the Onecho area. These early settlers built a schoolhouse for the children of the community and this structure became the first meeting place for religious gatherings. Logs for the school-church building were floated down the Snake river from Idaho and hauled by team and wagon up the Almota grade.

This early building was destroyed in a windstorm some years later and a new building was constructed a mile north of the old site.

In November of 1886, the first Swiss emigrants came to Washington Territory from Chaux de Fords, Switzerland, stopping briefly in Iowa en route to their final home. These emigrants were industrious farmers of a highly religious character.

Undoubtedly the pioneer Methodist organization attracted the attention of this small group of emigrants who had no church home, and they were welcomed with open arms. The two groups worshiped together for several years in the little school house.

In the spring of 1893, J. B. Baer, field secretary of the General Conference of Mennonites of North America, visited the community. After much discussion the First Mennonite church in the state of Washington was organized with 24 charter members. The late Rev. Paul Aeschliman was ordained as pastor of the newly-formed organization and he served in that capacity for 43 years.

In 1895, plans were made for the erection of a small one-room meeting house. The little old school house was no longer used for religious services after this. Even though times were hard and money scarce, all obstacles were overcome by the wonderful cooperation and energy of everyone in the community. The land on which the church was built was deeded to the group by J. J. Tompkins, and the small building served as the meeting place for both denominations for many years.

Later on it again became apparent that the one-room building was inadequate for the needs of the community. After much thought and planning a new edifice was dedicated December, 1926. Thirty-eight years later the membership felt the need of an educational unit and this was added and dedicated Oct. 4, 1964.

The two organizations worshiped together for more than 60 years. The late Rev. Earl Shoup retired in 1938 and he was the last minister to serve the Methodists at Onecho. The group later dissolved and affiliated with the Mennonites as full or associate members. In 1963, the organization withdrew from the Mennonite Pacific District Conference and became an independent church and the name was then changed to the Onecho Bible Church. Five pastors have served the church during its existence of approximately 80 years. Today the Onecho Bible Church serves 120 active members. Rev. Garland Shinn is pastor.

Miss Rubin is the Onecho Bible Church Historian.

WHY 'Bunchgrass Historian'?

By B. LeRoy Davidson

BUNCHGRASS HISTORIAN was the unanimous choice of the selection committee made from a long list of names suggested for our publication (for which we wish to express our thanks).

The name chosen seemed particularly suitable, as it expresses our purpose—to record the history of those bygone days of a country characterized as being one of the largest prairies of bunchgrass known.

Agropyron spicatum, the "bunchgrass," by its very numbers was the plant most perfectly suited to soil and climate of this area. The one tree in any amount was the ponderosa pine, found mainly to the east where it becomes so numerous as to shade out the grass. Bottom lands had cottonwoods, and blackhaw thornberry grew between; to the south and west on the breaks of the Snake river and in the scabland margins denuded of the topsoil by glacial flooding, sagebrush was the climax plant. But the bunchgrass grew with **all** of them to some degree. It is one of about a dozen northwest species of its kind, called "Wheatgrasses." It came to be known as "Bunch-wheatgrass" or "Bunchgrass," and is renowned as one of the finest of forages, supporting a variety of game birds and other animals. Later the Indian ponies, now famous in their own right as the Appaloosa, grazed the bunchgrass hills and valleys of Whitman county.

Although not a fragile grass, it is easily damaged, even destroyed, by overgrazing and has been largely displaced by the agricultural crops of cereal grains which now wave in the undulating motion of the sidewinder on those same hills, to have become the great wealth of the county today.

BUNCHGRASS HISTORIAN was the name suggested by E. Neal Klemgard. Mr. Klemgard is descended from one of the early families who came to this grassland of the Peluz Indians. To all who saw the grass flourishing on the land, it was an obvious indication of a rich soil beneath. And so it has proven to be; the black loess soil of the Palouse Prairie is surely its greatest natural resource.

Mr. Davidson is a landscape architect at Bellevue, Washington. He writes for several horticulture periodicals and last year received the Marcel La Pineac award in New York from the American Rock Garden Society for his outstanding work in horticultural research.

Dr. Klemgard is a noted chemical engineer; a man of great enthusiasm for a variety of interests, such as collecting old printing presses and precious stones.

If You Are Not Yet A Member of The Whitman County Historical Society

Individual Memberships Are Available

Regular—\$2.00/yr. - Receive Newsletters

Sustaining—\$10.00/yr. - Receive Newsletters and Quarterly

Charter—(Life) \$100 until Sept. 1, 1973 - Receive Newsletter and Quarterly

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Mention of source will be appreciated.

Parvin Family Lineage

By Lena Parvin

My grandfather, Samuel Eli Short, was born in "Kaintucky" in 1818—grandmother Polly Thompson Stone, born in 1822, was a northerner. This led to family friction which was never quite resolved.

They married in 1840 and lived in Missouri. Eight children. Grandpa enlisted in the Mexican War through which he served from 1848-1849.

In 1860, the Short family followed the Westward Ho urge and set forth on a five and one-half month ox team trek to Oregon, establishing a home in Umatilla until 1878 when a move was made to Walla Walla Valley. In four years another move took them still farther to the north to the Palouse country of which glowing reports were current of stirrup high bunchgrass and spring water on every quarter section. Three hundred and twenty acres were purchased from Northern Pacific Railroad Company indemnity lieu land located midway between Colfax and Palouse which at that time were only small trading centers.

My father, Asa Calvin Short, and mother, Harriet Branstetter, were married in 1870. They lived in Umatilla for eight years and also pushed northward, filing on a 160-acre claim near the east end of Kamiak Butte. This was home for 20 years. Seven children were born but only four survived. Mother passed away at the time of my birth. Aunt Emmy, father's sister, and Uncle William Ewing gave me a home and education.

I was married to Euel Parvin in 1915. Two sons were born. Engaged in farming, our entire lifetime has been spent in the Palouse area; the past 30 years on the homestead site of the late J. S. Parvin. My husband, Euel Parvin, passed away in September 1972.

I never knew the Branstetters, my maternal grandparents. They were married in Germany in the 1840's and immediately emigrated to the United States. Years following were spent for the most part in eastern cities endeavoring to find employment which would be anything from carpentry to street cleaning or dairy work. In the late 1830's they joined the ox team caravan with golden dreams and high hopes in their hearts.

Grandmother Branstetter was a doctor. The "Angel of Mercy" was at hand whenever her services were required, be it illness, injury of sorts, cuts, bruises, bullet wounds or childbirth. Once, when it became apparent that the amputation of a leg was the last resort to saving a man's life, Grandma rose to the occasion. She lost an eye while chopping wood for the campfire and cared for it herself. She lost an infant somewhere out in the desert on the way to Oregon.

The Branstetters settled in the Pendleton area where the name is still well known.

An article written by Mrs. Parvin in 1965 for the celebration of fifty years of marriage begins below:

Written in Honor of Our 50th Anniversary

By Lena Parvin

A half century! According to records a most eventful, and in many ways, phenomenal one.

Surely, no 50-year period of time has marked a greater transition in the business of human relations and endeavor than the one just preceding. We who

have been witness to the passing parade of milestones often reflect upon the achievements which we call "The Path of Progress."

An appraisal of ground covered in this accelerated age reveals that we have drifted far afield in quest of hidden potentials.

A long and very impressive list of developments and discoveries indispensable to our way of life have been initially disclosed in our time. We can only speculate upon where the future may lead us. But, in retrospect, we can check where we've been.

In 1915, extended travel was by train or boat, quite luxurious but infrequently experienced. A 500 mile journey was high adventure.

Few there were who surmised that the dawn of a new and revolutionary economic enterprise was so near at hand, namely, the automotive industry.

Cars were few but steadily increasing in number. Practically all were black, and none "glassed in." Isinglass side curtains provided ample protection against the elements, and were definitely safer. No shatter-proof glass and no windshield wipers. Make sure to carry a crank—the self starter, if any, might fail to work.

In those years "Old Timers" opined that, "Autos would never prove to be successful in these parts—too hilly and dangerous roads, plus the fact of limited driving season." The family pride and joy sat jacked up in the machine shed (no garages), from October 'till May. Furthermore, "Who can afford to give \$800 to \$1,100 for a car or even \$490 for a flivver, and then dig up 15c per gallon for gasoline?"

Because motoring was possible only in dry weather, the demand for more macadam roads became pressing. Slowly but surely hard surfaced highways and freeways threaded their way throughout the land.

Hills naturally remained unchanged; however, civil engineering has worked wonders in highway construction. No longer does it pass over or around, but instead, through, over or underpass regardless. Tremendous fills and 40, 50, 60-foot cuts would once have been proclaimed senseless and improvident.

No such nonsense as paying out good money for tractors (\$2,300) and trucks (\$1,400) had as yet taken root in the minds of farmers. Horse and mule power had always proven adequate for all needs; in addition, hay and oats to feed them were home grown, as were huge straw stacks which provided winter rations for some three or four months. On the other hand, a year's gasoline supply represented a sizeable cash outlay. Such management could very well lead to but one thing—BANKRUPTCY.

Harvesting of field crops was done with steam engine and stationary separator threshing outfits, requiring a crew of approximately 22 to 30 men whose wages ranged from \$1.50 to \$3.50 per day. Included was a cookhouse, two cooks, roustabout and water buck. Twenty-five to thirty head of horses kept the outfit in operation 16 hours per day, and turned out 2,300 and more sacks of grain. To sit on the sack pile and watch it all was a rare privilege enjoyed by many a youngster.

The 1915 market price on Red Russian, Triplet and other wheat varieties reached \$3.00 per bushel, wartime prices then plunged to 85 cents. Many misguided souls, having missed the boat, were never again quite the same.

A few ground power combines, 27 to 33 horse powered, were now in use, which meant no straw stacks—a serious drawback.

(To Be Continued in Summer Issue)