

Bunchgrass Historian



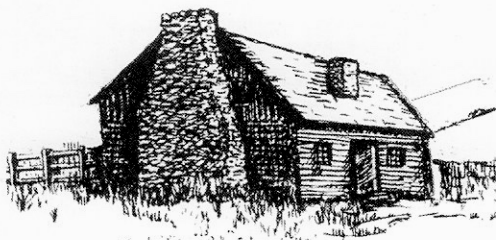
**Whitman County Historical Society
Colfax, Washington**

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SAINTS HOME CHURCH AND CAMPGROUND

COLFAX'S MARTHA WASHINGTON ROCK



Whitman County Historical Society

Colfax, Washington

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COVER

*Saints Home Campground attendees standing in front of the tabernacle tent.
The photograph was taken in 1942.*

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FROM THE EDITOR

Paul Guenther lives in Clarkston, Washington, and is a native of Colfax. In 2012, he authored a biography of his grandparents Sam and Anna Merry, who were early pioneers of Whitman County. In *The Path of Grace, The Story of Sam and Anna Merry*, he included a section on the Saints Home Church and Campground, which were a vital part of Sam and Anna's life. The Whitman County Historical Society provided much of the information for that book and for this article. Subsequent to the book's completion, Paul obtained additional information on the Saints Home ministry from Myron "Doc" Miller and JoAnn Miller, widow of Don Miller, both sons of Christian C. Miller, long-time pastor of the Saints Home ministry. He also completed additional research and interviews in preparation for writing this article.

Robert E. King, although raised in Pullman, has spent his working career employed as an archaeologist by the Bureau of Land Management – Alaska. There he has published *Postcards From Alaska: Souvenir Pictures of the Last Frontier, 1890s – 1940s* (2007). Bob, who is familiar to our readers as the author of many articles in the *Bunchgrass Historian*, has combined his interests as an avid postcard collector and as a researcher into Whitman County history to produce this article on the Martha Washington Rock in Colfax. Bob acquired many postcard images of this rock and researched the history of each card and of the rock itself (causing him to go beyond postcard images). We can enjoy the results in this article.





Saints Home Boarding School, circa 1897

SAINTS HOME CHURCH AND CAMPGROUND

By Paul Guenther

The Saints Home church and campground, formerly located between Pullman and Colfax on Union Flat Creek, was an integral part of the rich spiritual heritage of thousands of people in Whitman County and the region in the late 1800s and early to mid 1900s. It was owned by the Church of God, whose national office was, and still is, in Anderson, Indiana. The facility was beautifully located amongst a grove of tall pine trees, with Union Flat Creek flowing through the grounds. It was an ideal setting for a church and summer camp meeting.

It seemed only natural that such a community gathering place for spiritual worship and fellowship should be birthed in this location, as it was Union Flat where the first settlers of Whitman County came, starting in 1869. In 1870, Union Flat was the only settled district north of the Snake River, having 118 people living along the Creek.¹ In those early years, all roads were wagon-rutted country lanes and followed the cow and Indian trails that led to the old Indian ford on Union Flat. The trails converged and passed the Hamilton Schoolhouse, and in a short distance farther on was the Saints Home church and campgrounds.²

Its beginnings started in the 1890s with the establishment of the Saints Home boarding school for children. Articles of incorporation for the "Saints Home and School" were filed with the county auditor in February, 1897, for the purpose of conducting a school "where the word of God and common school branches may be taught." Prior to incorporation it had been operating for several years. The building was erected and maintained by the "Church of the Living God," who called themselves "The Evening Lights" and "The Saints." They had strong religious convictions and "...held frequent camp meetings."³ These descriptions were characteristic of the Church of God reformation movement of 1881, whose founder was Daniel S. Warner. One of the incorporators and directors of the new school was A.B. Peterman. Alfred F. Gray, a well-known Church of God minister in the early 1900s, described A.B. Peterman as a "local elder" when both of them attended the summer camp meeting in 1905.⁴

The school building was a three story frame structure and had about 75 students in 1897. On May 4, 1989, an article in the *Colfax Gazette* by Edith Erickson, Whitman County historian, stated "no record was found as to when the school closed, but some people felt that it did not last many years because of the very strict disciplinary schedule."

Annual summer camp meetings of the Church of God were held at the boarding school site, starting somewhere between 1892 and 1895.⁵ The school building



Saints Home Church in the pine trees - 1947

was initially used for camp meeting services, with the bottom story used to lodge those who didn't have tents. Later a large tent was put up to hold the services, and the school building continued to be used for lodging until it was eventually torn down. A new church was built in 1906 on the site, as noted in the *Pullman Herald* on July 7, 1906, which stated that "the 'Saints of the Living God'...on Union Flat are building a fine church building to the cost [of] \$3,000." Alfred Gray was there at that time and noted that "during the [1906] camping meeting the foundation was laid for the new chapel building. I was among those who remained after the meeting to construct the building."⁶

Harry Severs stated in a 1973 article in the *Bunchgrass Historian*² that the church was built on land donated by George Davis, a resident of the area. It may have been during this time period, after the land was donated to the Church of God and the church was built in 1906, that the grounds were officially dedicated, according to Clarence Howard.⁷

The 1973 article continues, "Twice each year, around the 4th of July, and again in the fall when the fall work was done church folks would assemble. In the days before the automobile the hitching rack on the grounds was lined with horses hitched to single buggies, surreys with the fringe on top, and ranch wagons called 'democrat wagons.' Folks even brought the family cows and turned them out into the pasture, along with the horses. The barn on the church property was full of hay for the horses and straw for the bed 'ticks' (mattresses). In those early years of the campground pioneers of the old Oregon Trail would come to relax, renew camp life, and share memories of the Old Oregon Trail while they visited."

Elmer Hickman, an early Whitman County pioneer, stated in an article in the *Pullman Herald*, on March 18, 1954, that he recalled the old-time meetings at Saints Home Campgrounds. "We lived on a farm three and one half miles from the

camp ground. We attended all the camp meetings throughout the years. We used to go to town and meet the people with a four-horse team and wagon, and bring them out with their baggage. Then when the meeting was over we would take them back. That was before automobile days, and we sure enjoyed doing this. We had wonderful meetings.”

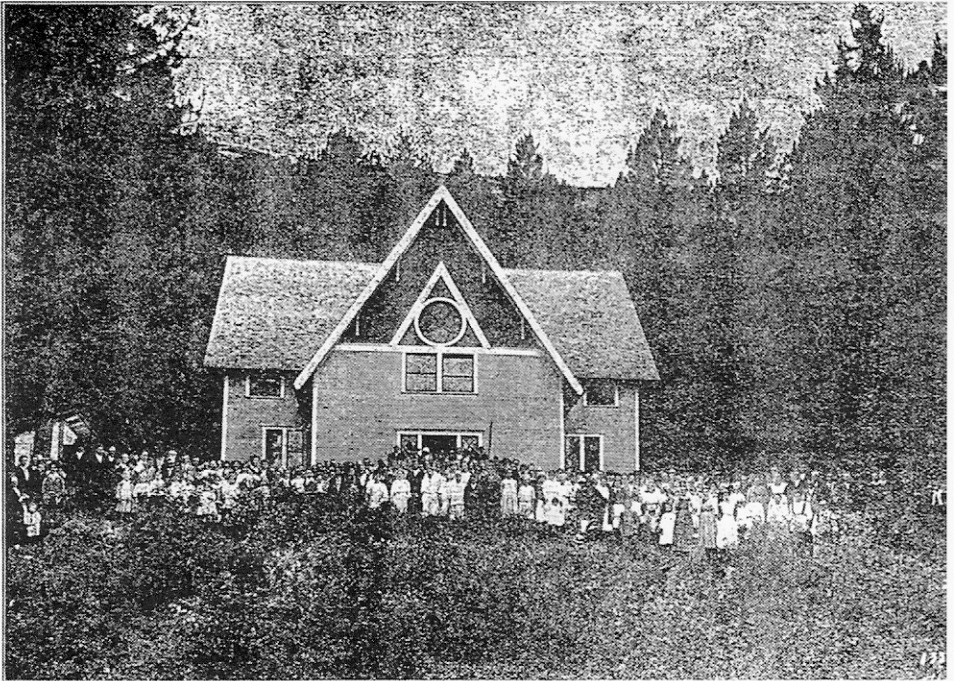
For almost seventy years, from 1895–1962, people would come from Eastern Washington, North Idaho, and Eastern Oregon to a 10-day summer camp meeting centered around the Fourth of July. According to articles and paid ads in the *Pullman Herald* in 1918, as many as 3,000 people (on Sundays and special event days) would gather at camp meetings to hear evangelists preach under the big tent, to camp out under the pine trees, and to enjoy food and fellowship in the kitchen and dining hall facilities (built in 1917), dormitory (the old schoolhouse), and grounds.⁸

For Riley B. Hatley, another Whitman County early pioneer (he came by wagon train to Whitman County in 1877), and his family, church was part of their daily living. His family would attend the yearly camp meeting at the Saints Home. The Hatley tent frame was the best on the campgrounds, as it was the only one with a board floor, board sides (making the tent roof higher), and a board door with hinges and a latch.⁹

In the early years, state “assembly meetings” of the Church of God pastors¹⁰ were held in November of each year, the last in 1909, after which they were held in Spokane. Alfred Gray attended a number of them, starting in 1903.¹¹



Both horse drawn buggies and automobiles can be seen in this early picture. The boarding school is on the right; the church is further up the road on the right.



Camp meeting attendees in front of Saints Home Church, circa 1917

The faith and the devotion of the people who came to the camp meetings are best expressed in the words of three attendees, who have written down their memories.

First, Marva McCoy of Moscow, related her own memories as well as those of long-time members of the Paradise Hills Church of God in Moscow.¹² “There was one lady who came to the camp meeting on crutches. When she left, she didn’t need them anymore. The first contact my family had with the Church of God was one summer at camp meeting time. We lived not far from the campground. My sister was very ill. The doctor said Goldie was in serious condition, having spasms when she got the least bit tired. Well, this lady who worked for us said to my father, ‘I suggest you go get someone to come pray for her.’ Dad said, ‘Who would I get and where would I go?’ ‘I know about someone out here,’ and she instructed him how to get to the campgrounds. So my father went to the campground and brought back Archie Forsythe and his son to pray for my sister. My sister never had a spasm after that, she was healed. ‘There were many stories from the members of healings, salvation, and spiritual growth as a result of the holy hours spent ‘with the Spirit’ at the campgrounds.”

“When problems developed in camp, we didn’t do much talking about it. The trouble would be stated and then you’d see small groups heading off in all directions to pray through on God’s solution. In my late high school years I was privileged to



attend several of the services at the Campgrounds. The love, seeking of God's will, and dedication made a deep impression on my life. A man named Chris Miller was in charge of the Sunday School and preaching services at camp meeting for several years. He also had charge of the grounds. He saw to it that anyone who came to the campgrounds had a place to stay and got situated. His wife was a good helper."

Second, Chris Miller's two sons, Doc and Don, both wrote down their memories.¹⁴ Chris and wife Lillie, were the pastor and caretaker of the Saints Home Church and Campground from 1917 to 1947.¹³ They also lived on and farmed 160 acres on the Parvin Road near Colfax. He was the great uncle of the author.

Christian C. Miller and wife Lucille, 50th Wedding Anniversary. Long-time pastor of Saints Home Church and Campground. They first met at camp meeting.

Doc and Don Miller remembered the following: "About a week before camp meeting was to start people from the church would come for a clean up day, cleaning the ground, and erecting a large tent tabernacle which was used for the meetings. Brush was cleared away around trees so that cars could be parked and tents could be pitched. They also put 30 or 40 similar tents over wooden frames, the frames of which were left in place all year. When I was old enough I do all of this. When I was very young, I picked up pine cones and got them off the camp grounds as my contribution to clean up day. One tradition of clean-up day was to serve wieners and ice cream for the crew. Dad would go to town and get wieners and a large container of ice cream which was kept cold in a thick, quilted, insulated covering. In those days, there were no freezers or even refrigerators in the kitchen or dining hall. There was an ice box but it was not cold enough to keep ice cream frozen so we ate it quickly."

"The big-top tent reminded me and other kids of a three-ring circus. Rest assured, however, that no circus animal ever set foot, or hoof, or paw, in that tent. Its mission was more akin to that of a revival tent where Jerry Falwell or Billy Graham would have held forth. On a wooden stage about a foot high stood a pulpit that looked down upon rows of pews. Every year the pews, pulpit and well-used upright piano were hauled in from the nearby church building."

“Folks would come from all around... some would move into the tents we had prepared, some would bring their own tents, and some slept in the hayloft of a small barn located on the grounds. In earlier years, I stayed with my folks in their tent. Later, a friend and I leveled a small space on a hillside overlooking the grounds, and erected our own tent and slept there. My friend’s name was Keith Plank. Later he became an evangelist, a pastor, and a missionary to Costa Rica. He was a neat friend. Straw from the barn on the property was used to stuff straw ticks (mattresses). When stuffing them you had to make sure they weren’t too thin or too thick.”

“Much of the food for the meetings was donated. My Dad usually provided beef. A farmer near the church pastured cows nearby and provided fresh milk each day. My Mother made great quantities of egg noodles and canned a lot of fruit to be used at camp meeting. Usually someone was hired to do the cooking for the meetings, but kitchen helpers, table waiters, and dish washers were all volunteers. All of the cooking was done on wood stoves. Boxes were placed by the door for cash contributions, but no fees were charged for meals.”

A cousin of Doc and Don, Reuben Merry, age 94 and living in Pullman, also shared his memories with the author.¹⁵ While growing up, Reuben attended Saints Home in the late 1920s and 1930s with his father and mother, Sam and Anna Merry, grandparents of the author. Sam was a cook for 20 years at camp meeting and taught Sunday School at the Saints Home Church.



Family tents 1942

Veletta Hatley Frank, granddaughter of Riley B. Hatley, Whitman County Pioneer



Dining Hall, built in 1917, seated 200-250 people

Reuben Merry remembered, “I was given the task by my father of milking the cows each day. My father Sam was the chief cook at the camp meeting for many years, with my mom Anna assisting him. I remember the adjacent building to the cafeteria where some of the food preparation was done, and that hot water was prepared for camp by heating on the cook stoves in the kitchen. Food was either donated, or special offerings were taken to purchase food. A next door neighbor to the camp meeting site, ‘Grandma’ Nellie Davis, wife of Clyde Davis, would donate vegetables from her garden, including lettuce, carrots, and peas. I would help by going to collect it.”

Marva McCoy stated, “The meals were done on a free-will offering basis. I never heard of anyone going hungry or the kitchen running out of food. One year the Indians from Lapwai furnished elk meat for meals. Others would furnish hogs or beef cattle for meat. Each year the ladies would can extra fruit and vegetables from their garden to take to camp meeting the next year. It took about 20 waiters to serve the tables in the dining hall. Several times there were so many people we had to eat in shifts...feeding 200 people, clearing tables, and setting them again for 200 more.”

Doc continued, “Everyone at camp meeting had three meals per day in the dining hall, a rather spacious wooden frame structure with rows of tables and benches. Except for a couple hired to do the cooking (Sam and Anna Merry, Doc’s Uncle and Aunt) volunteers did all the work. They washed dishes, waited tables, bused dirty dishes and cleaned the place up.” The refreshment stand under the dining hall held special memories - at special times in the day ice cream, pop and



Folks enjoying camp, date unknown

Refreshment stand and bookstore are on the bottom right (kids in front)

candy were sold at the treat stand, run by Chris Miller. The kids they would save their money throughout the year so they could use it at camp meeting each summer. No doubt their savings were all used at the treat stand!

Camp meetings were a special place to connect with neighbors and friends. There was a community spirit, a willingness to get together, and a dependence that people had on one another, that was common in rural communities in those days. They were a melting pot for teenagers, a great place for matchmaking. Many stories could be told of this.

“Meetings were held throughout the day, with the main ones in mid-morning and each evening. A well known evangelist from the Church of God conducted the evening meetings. The singing and preaching were good, and during the services foot washings (a church ordinance) were performed as a part of worship. Folks would make sure their feet were clean before they came to service so as not to be embarrassed. At the end of the evening service the evangelist urged people to come forward, kneel at the altar and be saved from their sins. His spell binding sermons generally succeeded in moving a goodly number of sinners to hasten forward.” Clarence Howard and his family’s musical group played and sang during tent meeting services - “When we sang, the Spirit of God worked and the altars were filled.”

Doc continued “toward the end of camp meeting, a baptismal service was

held in Union Flat Creek which ran through the property. Dad or another minister waded waist deep and submerged those who had been saved during camp meeting. Fully clothed these folks were dunked backwards into the muddy water and came up gasping and spitting.” Alfred Gray described the day in November, 1903, when he was baptized in Union Flat Creek: “As I entered the water I felt I was leaving the whole world behind. It was like a spiritual funeral. We (there were three others being baptized too) all came out of the watery grave with hands held high in victory...”¹⁶

“There was no electricity on the property, so an old rather temperamental gas powered generator was used in the evenings to provide power for a few lights in the church, tabernacle, and around the grounds. There were no bathrooms with running water at the campground. Folks used three-hole or four-hole outhouses (privies). There were no showers or bathtubs, so some bathed in the river, while others used pans in their tents to wash.”

In 1935 the members of the Saints Home Church voted to change the name to the Union Center Church. Pastor C.C. Miller stated in an article in the *Pullman Herald* dated May 31, 1935, “The congregation has decided that the name Saints Home is misleading, since it is not a home, nor has it been a saints’ home for 40 years. The only time the place could truly be called a saints’ home is during the annual camp meeting, when Christian people make it their home for 10 days. Union Center church is conducted solely for the upbuilding of God’s kingdom. The pastor extends a hearty greeting to all living in the community to worship God with us at Union Center church. Sunday school is at 10 a.m., followed by the preaching services at 11 o’clock.”



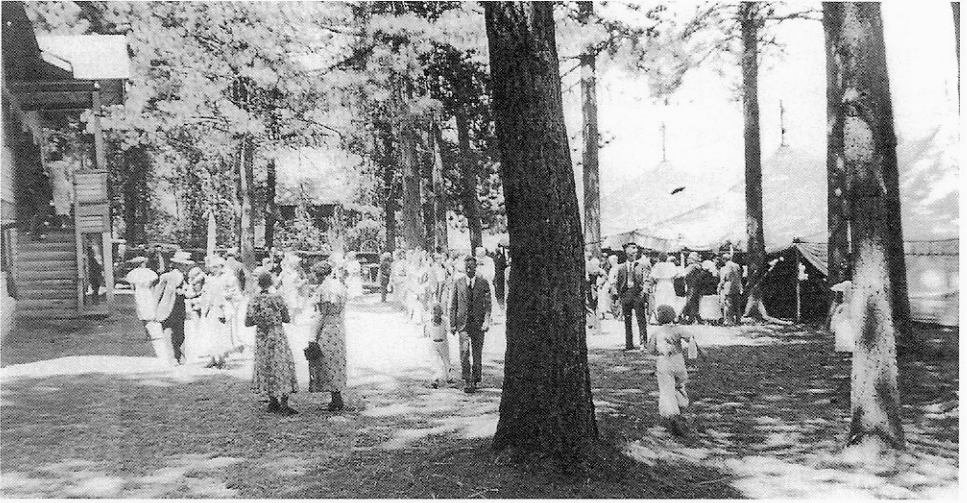
The Tabernacle Tent (date unknown)



The front of the tent tabernacle

The Saints Home, now Union Center Church, continued its weekly church services and summer camp meeting ministry through the early 1960s. Sharon Hoseley of Clarkston remembers¹⁷ attending camp meetings as a youth from 1954 to 1961, and even as a little girl when she was 5 to 8 years old. She remembers the sawdust floor of the tabernacle tent, the smells, the sounds, the singing, and the great atmosphere of camp meeting. She says it “electrified her as a kid.” She made many friends, sang in quartets, and the youth were made to feel important. She remembers the “hellfire and brimstone” preaching, kneeling at the altar, and making a life time commitment to the Lord. She states that from 1956 to 1958 around 20 private one room cabins were built in the same area people camped out in tents. In the summer of 1957, she remembers helping to make 500 quarts of “good!” applesauce to donate to camp and where she worked in the dining hall.¹⁷

Clarence Howard related that in the 1950s, two local ministers (who had moved out from the East) tried to convince people that the trees were too old (later proved wrong) and that there was value in cutting the pine trees down on the property, in order to use the revenue to build a new church. There was need for a new church, and more, as Harry Sever related in a 1954 article in the *Pullman Herald* that the condition of the church, dining hall, and road were in significant need of repair when he and his mother viewed them in 1953.¹⁸ To confirm this, Clarence further noted that the state had condemned both the dining hall kitchen, as well as the spring water system that supplied water to the campground. Toward the last,

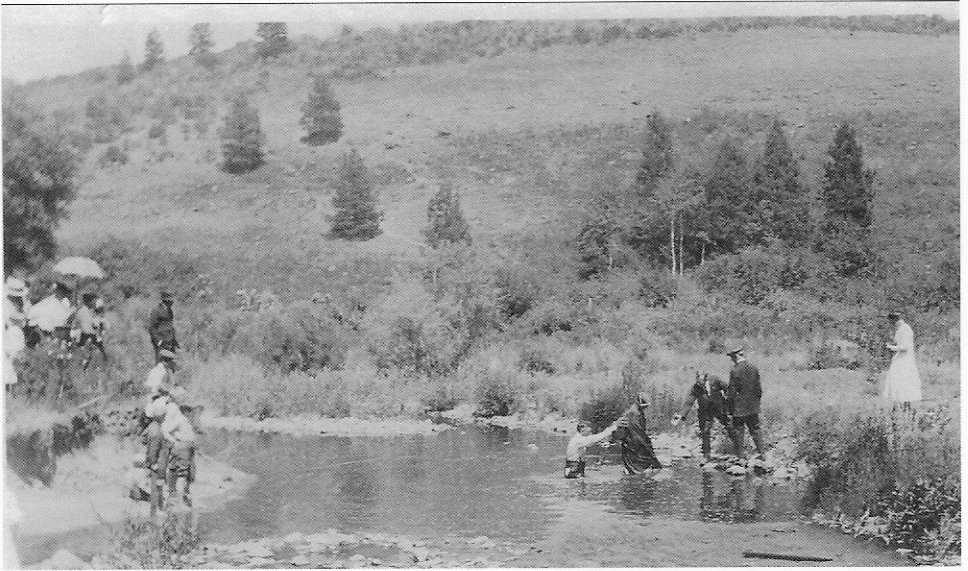


Camp Meeting, date unknown. Notice the parked cars. Dining hall on the left, and tabernacle tent on the right.

water had to be hauled to the water storage reservoir. Also, the electrical system for the camp was condemned. So it was apparent that lots of money was needed in order to make much needed improvements to the campground facilities. No doubt the huge question was how to raise the money!

The issue of cutting the trees down created a huge controversy and a lot of ill feelings. One can only imagine how big of an issue this was as it was the pine trees that had created the great natural setting and atmosphere of the camp from the very beginning. As it turned out the ministers convinced enough people so that the decision was made to cut the trees down. Jay McCoy, Moscow, came to camp for the first time in 1959 and remembers the tabernacle tent, where he was saved, and the pine trees. After he and Marva were married in 1960 they returned to camp meeting in 1960 and found the trees to be gone and a new metal building stood in place of the tent. The last time they came to camp had been in 1962.

Once the trees were gone it was a whole different place. In her 1980 article Marva wrote, "In later years of the life of the Colfax Campgrounds, the dusty walkways, roads, and paths were an unpleasant reminder of what some said was the unwise cutting of the pine trees in the area. Many misunderstandings and personality differences came to light during those years before the dissolution of the campground. Many wondered about what was the right thing to do." Clarence stated, "Once the pine trees were gone and the metal building was constructed (replacing the tent tabernacle), it was too hot and dusty, especially during the day. It killed the interest of the people, and the numbers of people attending went down after that, something fierce. Prior to the trees being cut down it was paradise, but afterwards hell." With falling numbers of people and lack of support there apparently was



A new believer being baptized (date unknown)

not enough financial resources to further upgrade the aging facilities and keep the Campground going. Difficult decisions had to be made.

The last year that the Saints Home Church and Campground operated was 1962. The last newspaper advertisement for the Saints Home Camp Meeting appeared in the *Colfax Gazette* on July 12, 1962.¹⁹ In a *Gazette* article of May 4, 1989, Edith Erickson reported “a public auction sale of the campground in 1965 was a sad day for many people who had spent many summers at the camp, even though it had not been used for many years.” A Warranty Deed for the sale of the property was filed with the Whitman County Courthouse on October 17, 1966. The seller was the Inland Empire Home Missionary Board of the Church of God, a Washington Corporation. Edith stated – “Only a small cemetery, still owned by the Church of God, remains on the Davis farm on the St. Home Road (hill above the property). The burials were between 1894 and the early 1920’s. Many, many of these burials were children.”

Harry Sever stated in his 1954 Pullman Herald article - I do think there should be a monument to the Saints Home Camp Ground –

Aye! Call it Holy Ground
The soil where first they trod
They have left unstained
What there they found –
Freedom to worship God.

Be Sure and Come to
The Colfax Camp-Meeting

The General Camp-Meeting of the Church of God for Eastern Washington, Idaho, Eastern Oregon

JULY 6 to 15

Our new dining hall, which seats 250 will be ready. On special days the attendance is expected to number above 3,000. We look eagerly ahead for the largest and best meeting ever held on the grounds. Within the next few years we expect to develop this meeting into one of the largest religious gatherings in the Northwest.

Why You Should Attend

It will give you an outing, take you away from the cares of life--give you rest, inspiration and pleasure. Then, the genuine "old time religion" will be made so interesting, so inspiring and so beneficial that you will want to hear every sermon. Able Evangelists will make the services especially inviting. You will get inspiration that will make life brighter and better, that will make home happier. You can't afford to miss it. By all means attend.

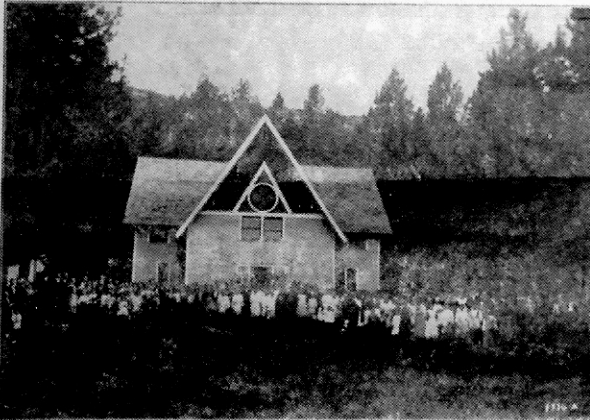
Three Preaching Services Daily

10: A. M., 2:30 and 7:30 P. M.

Young People's Meeting, 6:30 Sunday Evenings.

Children's Meeting, 9:00 A. M.

Over 30 Evangelists and Ministers Expected



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Every Day a
Big Day
Watch the Press
for Program

MEALS reasonable
TENTS for Rent
JITNEY service can
be had from both
Pullman and Colfax

All Teachings Absolutely Non-Sectarian

The Bible in all its purity and fullness constitutes our teachings. We have no man-made creed. The New Testament is our discipline. Every Bible Christian, irrespective of church membership, is welcome to work and worship with us. Justification, Sanctification, Unity, Divine Healing, Baptism, and in fact, EVERY doctrine of the New Testament will be presented in a kindly, Christian-like spirit. There will be deliverance and victory for the lost; sanctification for believers; healing for the sick; help for the dependent, and encouragement for all.

LOCATION: 10 miles South of Colfax.
10 miles West of Pullman

GOOD ROADS. COME.

¹ Edith E. Erickson, *Whitman County, From Abbeville to Zion*, (1985), p. 104.

² Harry E. Sever, "End of an Era," *Bunchgrass Historian*, Volume 1, No. 2, Summer, 1973.

³ "Saints Home and School," *Pullman Herald*, February 27, 1897, p. 6.

⁴ Albert Frederick (A.F.) Gray (1886-1969) was a well known Church of God evangelist, preacher, and pastor in the early 1900s. He was the founding pastor of the Clarkston, WA, Church of God, 1915 - 1920. Subsequently he became the founding president of Warner Pacific Bible College in Portland, Oregon, a Church of God Bible College. He regularly attended the Saints Home Campground from 1903 - 1926. He wrote an autobiography "Times and Tides on the Western Shore," (1966), from which some of the information for this article was taken.

⁵ An article in the June 21, 1918, edition of the *Pullman Herald* stated that "the 23rd annual camp meeting of the Church of God is to be held at the Saints Home ...opens tomorrow." However, in an April 23, 1937, article, it stated that the 45th annual camp meeting was coming up. Thus, the first camp meeting would have started somewhere between 1892 and 1895.

⁶ Gray, p. 30.

⁷ Clarence Howard (age 97) lives in Pullman and is a long-time member of the Paradise Hills Church of God, Moscow. He attended the Saints Home Campground for many years. The author interviewed Clarence Howard, Jay and Marva McCoy, and Reuben Merry on February 18, 2013.

⁸ "Annual Saints Camp-Meeting June 21-30," *Pullman Herald*, June 14, 1918, p. 2

⁹ George B. Hatley, Pioneer, *The Life and Times of Riley B. Hatley*, (1998), p. 63.

¹⁰ "Annual Assembly at Saints Home," *The Colfax Gazette*, November 6, 1903, page 2.

¹¹ Gray, p. 16.

¹² Marva McCoy, "Remembrances of That 'Old-Time' Religion," *The Gospel Trumpet of the Church of God (Moscow)*, Vol. 2, No. 6, (June, 1980), pp 1-3.

¹³ Donald W. Roth, "The Family of Christian L. and Elizabeth Litwiller Miller," February 7, 1994, p. 43 states that Christian C. Miller (son of Christian L. Miller) "was ordained as a minister in the Church of God. He was the pastor of a small rural church (Saints Home) near Colfax for about 30 years. He considered the ministry as his vocation and farming as his means of livelihood. Christian and Lillie moved to Riverside, California, in 1947." The same words are also stated in a document titled "My Parents and Grandparents," by Don Miller (date unknown). It was thus concluded that Christian (Chris) C. Miller pastored the Saints Home from 1917 to 1947.

¹⁴ Myron Dale 'Doc' Miller, "The Doc Miller Saga," Revised 2006. Doc is 88 years old and currently lives in Davis, California. Don Miller's "Camp Meeting" was included in books he gave his grandchildren. Don passed away in 2009, but JoAnn Miller, his wife, is still alive.

¹⁵ Reuben Merry's memories were conveyed to the author over a period of time while he was writing *Path of Grace, The Story of Sam and Anna Merry*, (2012).

¹⁶ Gray, pp 17-18.

¹⁷ Phone interview with Sharon Hoseley, Clarkston, WA, February 21, 2013.

¹⁸ "Saints Home District Center of Activity 60 Ago," *Pullman Herald*, March 18, 1954, p. 2.

¹⁹ *Colfax Gazette*, July 12, 1962, advertisement reads - "Church of God Camp Meeting at the Saints Home Campground, July 16 - 23. Meals served on the grounds. Everyone Welcome". There were no similar advertisements in 1963.

Able Evangelists of Northwest Will Take Part in The Colfax Camp-Meeting

The General Camp-Meeting of the Church of God for Eastern Washington, Idaho, Eastern Oregon



S. H. Eddings

JUNE 27 to JULY 6

Sunday Attendance Usually Above 3,000

As the Press Frequently Says:

"One of the Best Attended Gatherings in the Country."

You Will Enjoy Hearing these
Prominent Men COME

COLFAX'S MARTHA WASHINGTON ROCK

by Robert E. King

When the first pioneers arrived in the Colfax area, they were amazed to see a most unusual geologic feature, which later came to be called the Martha Washington Rock. It was an approximately 20-foot-high basalt column, tapered at both ends and bulging in the middle, which stood inexplicably balanced on a lava bluff just north of the North Fork of the Palouse River overlooking the future town of Colfax. This intriguing rock, the largest and most notable of more than a dozen basalt pillars in the vicinity, became the pride of the town and was featured on early advertisements, postcards, and more.

On April 19, 1907, the front page of the *Colfax Gazette* presented its own description and history of the Martha Washington Rock, although not stating how or exactly when it got its name, which was already in use several years earlier. The headline read: "Martha Washington Rock: A Balloon-Shaped Basalt in the North End of Town."

The article went on to state: "A peculiar-shaped specimen of basaltic rock overlooks Colfax on the north end. It has been named the Martha Washington, and has been photographed and pictures of it are for sale in all the art windows. While the pictures are perfect in outline and gives one a correct idea of its peculiar shape, it must be seen to be understood and appreciated. There are many more famous rocks in the state, particularly along the Columbia river below The Dalles, but the



4441
Martha
Washington Rock
and North Colfax,
Colfax, Wash.

An image of the Martha Washington rock as published by McCroskey

Martha Washington is a great curiosity and a wonder as well from a geological point of view. It is not more than a mile from the business center of Colfax, and stands on the flat surface of one of the abrupt ledges that line the face of the bluff overlooking the north end of town. The rock is balloon-shaped, coming almost to a point on both ends, bulging out at the sides, perfectly symmetrical in all its proportions, as though inflated with hot air like a balloon. It stands fully 20 feet high. The lower point of the rock where it rests on the shelving basalt is not more than three feet in diameter, and here is where the most wonderful thing is connected with Martha Washington comes in, aside from its peculiar shape. It rests on the foundation, not being a part of or connected with it in any way. This can be easily perceived by stooping down and looking under it in any direction, as the foundation is not altogether smooth and a small stick can be pushed through from several points, enough to show that it is entirely disconnected. How did it come there? How did it get its peculiar shape? The rock is the same formation as all the rock hereabouts. It is volcanic, not glacial, in appearance and formation, hence was not dropped down through an iceberg during the glacial period. If it was whittled into its present shape, as geologists would undoubtedly tell us, by the elements, how did it become entirely disconnected from the parent rock, and how does it keep its equilibrium in the face of wind and storm or the efforts of many to overturn it?"

The Martha Washington Rock becomes a business logo

The first business to use the Martha Washington Rock in its advertising was the Tennessee Restaurant and Lodging House (that often used the clever shorthand of "10 S. C." for Tennessee). It incorporated a photograph of the Martha Washington rock in a grouping of three pictures dating to 1896 that were used to promote the business. A surviving example¹ refers to the Martha Washington Rock by that name, suggesting it was already a point of local pride and curiosity.

Several years later, the Colfax Brewing and Malting Company, like prior breweries in early Colfax, was established in the northern part of Colfax on the North Fork of the Palouse River, south of the Martha Washington Rock. The brewery adopted its likeness as a company logo and used it on beer bottle labels as well as other advertising items in the early 1900s. The firm was established in 1904 and would end in 1915 with the passage of Prohibition legislation in Washington State.² The beer produced by the firm was advertised as "Old Style Ger-



A beer bottle label using the Martha Washington rock in the logo



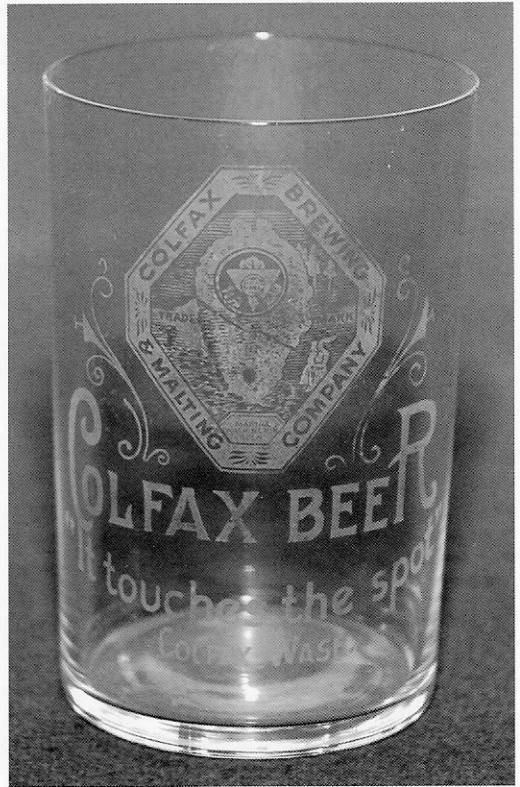
An advertising piece from the 10 S.C. Restaurant in Colfax

man Beer” and the main label on the bottle showed a half-timbered multi-story German brewery, far different than the relatively simple Colfax brewery. In addition, the smaller neck label showed Colfax’s intriguing rock formation.

The use of the Martha Washington rock image was not limited just to beer bottles. It was additionally employed on glass signs produced for the Colfax Brewing and Malting Company as advertising pieces destined for Colfax and other area saloons. Also, the trademarked picture of the rock was etched into the sides of clear beer glasses, presumably given out for advertising purposes.³

The *Colfax Gazette* on Feb. 10, 1905 (p. 7) and again on Feb. 17, 1905 (p. 7) carried a fictionalized news story that was actually a humorous advertisement for the Colfax Brewing and Malting Company. It tied the promotion of its beer into recent troubles in Russia. The ad was teasingly headlined: “The City Is Filled With Sensational Rumors: St. Petersburg, Russia, Jan. 25, ’05—Emperor Nicholas was prostrated by grief this morning and called his counselors to this support. The cabinet decided after an all night session to order at once a supply of the new export bottled beer, manufactured by the Colfax Brewing Company, to maintain the strength and vigor of the czar.”

After another phony headline: “To Prevent the Entire Collapse of Russian Autocracy,” the ad continued: “Our special correspondent considers this order of the cabinet very significant in view of the critical situation, as in his personal opinion, only such bottles could benefit the czar. Only genuine with our trade mark, ‘The Martha Washington Rock.’ [signed] The Colfax Brewing and Malting Co. Telephone red 611.”



A beer glass from the Colfax Brewing and Malting Company showing the Martha Washington rock in the logo.

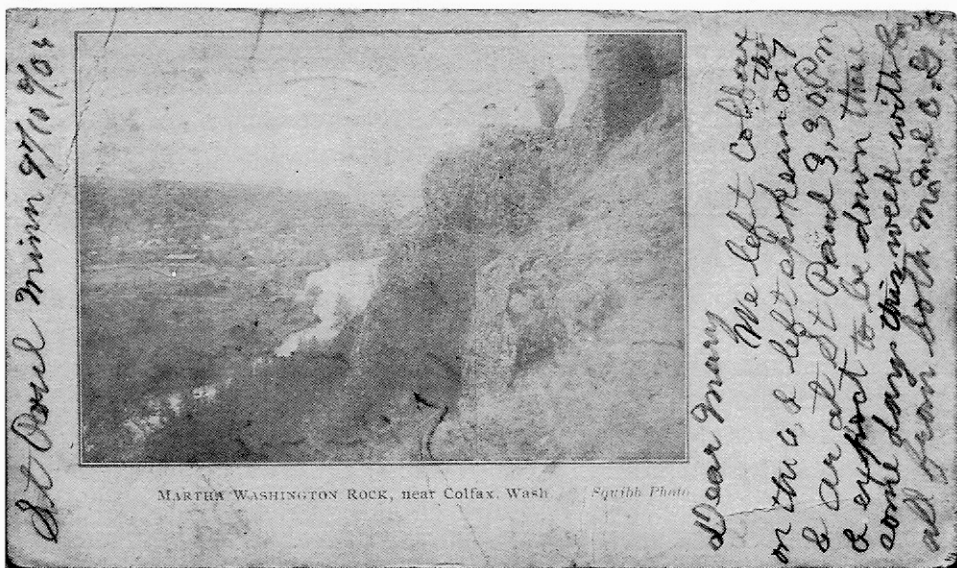
Early Postcards

Between 1898 and 1901, the first known postcard image of the Martha Washington Rock was made and published by an early Colfax photographer, Rob-

ert K. Squibb, with the postcard marked “Squibb Photo.”⁷⁴ It was a lithographic reproduction of a real photograph, and was among the earliest postcards depicting a place in Whitman County. Squibb’s Martha Washington Rock postcard was probably made soon after federal law was changed in May of 1898 to allow the mailing of private postcards with messages for a penny instead of two cents. This change caused the demand for postcards to mushroom and triggered a new national fad: sending and collecting postcards. Thus, starting around 1900 and continuing through the mid-1910s, images of the Martha Washington Rock circulated throughout the county and indeed the entire world.

Squibb’s earliest known postcard image was not nearly as good as ones that would soon follow. It showed the Martha Washington Rock from the north side looking south toward Colfax. But it was colored a light red and was a relatively fuzzy image due to poor printing. Much more impressive were several later postcard depictions of Colfax’s “celebrity” rock. These included the production of at least one real-photo postcard of the geologic oddity and several better quality lithographic postcards.

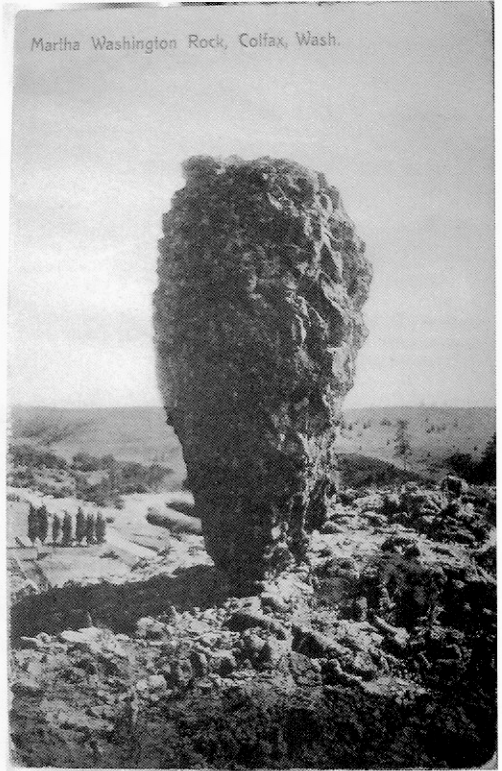
At least two local druggists created Martha Washington Rock postcards for sale in their stores. One was Charles F. Stuart, who became a partner in the Colfax Drug Store in 1899 and by March of 1900 Stuart was the sole proprietor. He operated the business under various names until October 1908. As “Stuart’s Cash Drug Store” it was located beside the Post Office on Main Street. In late 1908, he disposed of his business, and by 1909 had moved to Malden, where he was appointed the new town’s second postmaster on November 24, 1909. He served



An early example of a postcard showing the Martha Washington rock published by Robert K. Squibb

in that capacity until mid-1910.⁵ An advertisement in the *Colfax Gazette* on November 27, 1908 (p. 9) shows that Stuart's former Colfax drug store was subsequently operated as Ripley Pharmacy. Between 1901 and 1908, Stuart published at least one postcard view of the Martha Washington Rock. Likely, he also published other postcards with images of Colfax and vicinity to meet local demand.

Another Colfax druggist in the early 1900s produced even more postcards of the towering rock oddity for sale. He was Virgil T. McCroskey (1876-1970), later a noted conservationist and the man who bought Step-toe Butte and donated it for a park. McCroskey operated the Elk Drug Store in Colfax with a brother and thus was in direct competition with Stuart's drug store in the early 1900s. The McCroskeys' business also included the incidental sale of postcards



A Virgil T. McCroskey color postcard

located on special postcard racks in the front of their store. According to the *Colfax Gazette* of December 28, 1906 (p. 5), the Elk Drug stocked "thousands of postcards from all over the world," though "thousands" was probably an exaggeration. Consequently, the McCroskeys became an important force in the production and supply of more postcards bearing the image of the Martha Washington Rock.

Some of the McCroskey postcards were printed in color, including a few created from a real-photo picture that was also being sold. Most, if not all, were produced in Germany under a contract with the McCroskeys, with some postcards hand-painted. The workmanship was quite good, in contrast to Squibb's earlier known postcard of the Martha Washington Rock, which may have been printed locally in Colfax, with inferior results. Interestingly, one of the McCroskey postcards was published by the large postcard firm of Edward H. Mitchell and Company of San Francisco. This business was involved with the creation of hundreds of early postcards depicting many other places, including early Pullman.

In mid-1908, the McCroskeys published a special series of Colfax postcards and placed ads in four issues of the *Colfax Gazette* (May 29, June 12, July 3, and August 7, 1908) announcing their availability: "Six new hand painted post

cards of Colfax and her public buildings, Martha Washington Rock, a combination harvester, a general view of the city, and a beautiful country estate. These are the climax of perfection in the post card maker's art, and they may be had at the same price as the most ordinary cards—2 for 5 cents, 25 cents a dozen, postpaid to any address, V. T. McCroskey & Bro., Elk Drug store, Colfax, Wash.”

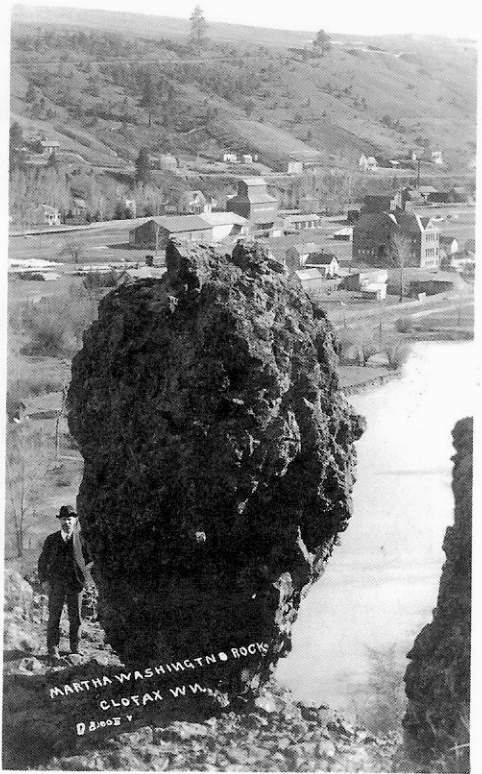
The McCroskey postcards also included a picture of what were called the “Martha Washington Bluffs,” showing not only the Martha Washington Rock but additional (less impressive) basalt pinnacles nearby.

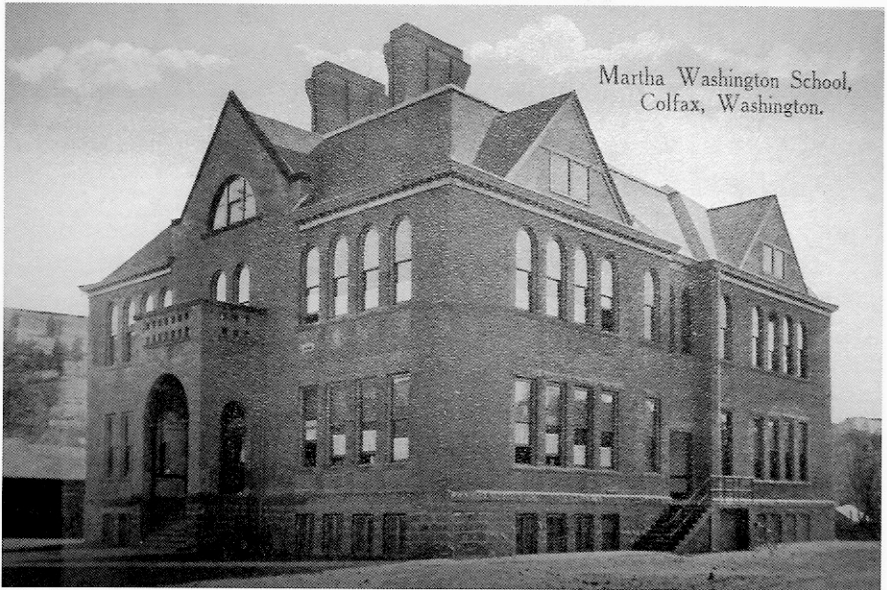
One other postcard depicting the Martha Washington Rock was published by Sprouse & Son, Importers and Publishers of Tacoma, Washington.⁶ It included yet another geological curiosity in the region called the “McKinley Rock,” a boulder that, with a little imagination, had some resemblance to a human face. No other postcards photos or stories about this less-impressive feature are known.

As a side note, nationally Colfax's Martha Washington Rock was not the only rock named for the wife of the first President. Early 20th century postcards also depicted the “Martha Washington Profile” on a rock formation in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. In contrast to Colfax's Martha Washington Rock, the New England version actually did resemble Martha wearing a cap on her head.

Martha Washington School

In 1894, Colfax had opened a substantial elementary school in North Colfax, located there until the 1950s near what is today's Jennings Elementary School. The large structure was initially called the North Ward School but was renamed the Martha Washington School in 1912 or 1913 in honor of the nearby Martha Washington Rock.⁷ By this time, the rock, now a “celebrity” from all of its postcard fame, was also drawing a steady stream of sight-seers. They would hike up the steep bluff and sometimes pose for pictures next to the impressive oddity, marveling at how it was balanced there.





A postcard showing the Martha Washington School

The rock was mentioned in a clever yet melancholy comment about a disaster to hit the town. In early March of 1910, Colfax suffered extensive flood damage when both the North and South Forks of the Palouse River sent immense quantities of water into the town as part of an unprecedented regional flood. On March 11, 1910, the *Colfax Gazette* (page 1), still reeling from the disaster, said: "Martha Washington rock looks down on the wreck caused by the flood in the north end without a smile or even shedding tears. Martha is immobile and has a heart of stone." Indeed!

The Fate of the Martha Washington Rock

In a front page story in its January 30, 1914 edition, *The Colfax Gazette* carried the sad story of what became of the town's notable rock, headlined: "'Martha Washington' Gone: This historic rock, bearing the name of Martha Washington and balanced on a ledge high up on the bluff over-looking north Colfax, was blown from its foundation at 4:15 Monday morning [January 26, 1914] and with the roar of a dozen runaway teams, crumbled and crashed in an avalanche down the bluff. Residents of that vicinity sprang trembling from their beds to learn the cause of the unusual disturbance."

On page 6, the same paper carried more information under the column entitled "Martha Washington School: The fierce wind storm early Monday morning [January 26, 1914] succeeded in toppling over the Martha Washington rock which stood on the hill just north of the school building. During the day some 200 to 250 people from town were out to view broken fragments of the rock which

were scattered along the base of the cliff. Our class prophet, however, tells that this destruction of the rock is no ill omen for the school, but only a pointer to the fact that the rock, having fulfilled its mission in the world, was forced to give way before a more lasting monument to this renowned companion to our great national hero. This new and more appropriate monument he indicates is the new Martha Washington school, which will leave its imprint upon the hearts and lives of the boys and girls of the town for generations to come.” Sadly, however, the Martha Washington School was torn down in the 1950s.

The flat basalt ledge where the Martha Washington Rock stood is still an impressive geologic feature. It has not gone unnoticed by some of today’s people. In 2012, there is graffiti spray-painted along a portion of its lower face so as to be visible from the road to Spokane as well as the nearby elementary and high schools. The various lava pinnacles in the vicinity of the now-fallen Martha Washington Rock remain as silent witnesses to their once-famous, but now-absent, partner. This intriguing rock, a geologic wonder of early Colfax, brought special pride and interest not only to the residents of town, but also to many visitors who had marveled at its mystery.

¹ This advertising piece is owned by Mike Markey. He and Don Myott also supplied some of the beer advertising images and postcard images of the Martha Washington Rock used in this article.

² Herman Wiley Ronnenberg, “Brewed in Colfax,” *Bunchgrass Historian*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2007, pp. 21-22.

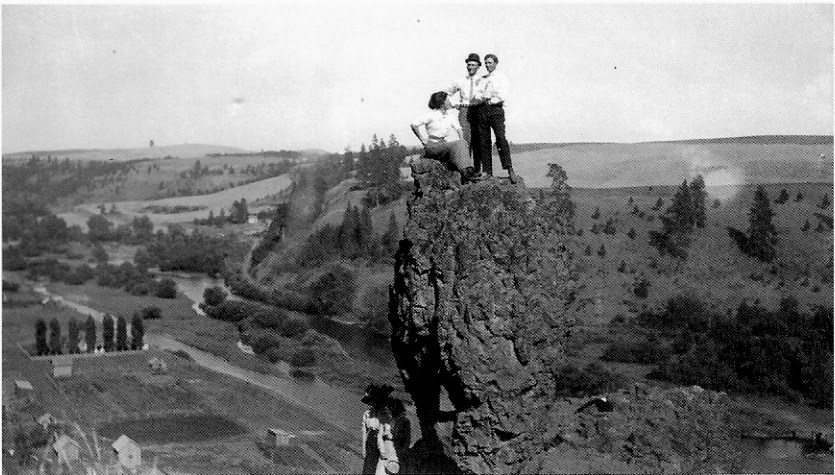
³ Ronnenberg, pp. 15-16.

⁴ The 1900 census of Colfax reported Robert K. Squibb, born 1871 in Tenn., as single and managing a local lodging house. In 1910, the census reported him as married and operating a confectionary store in Colfax. Thus, his work as a photographer may have been only short-lived, or at least not a full-time pursuit. Later, he moved to Spokane.

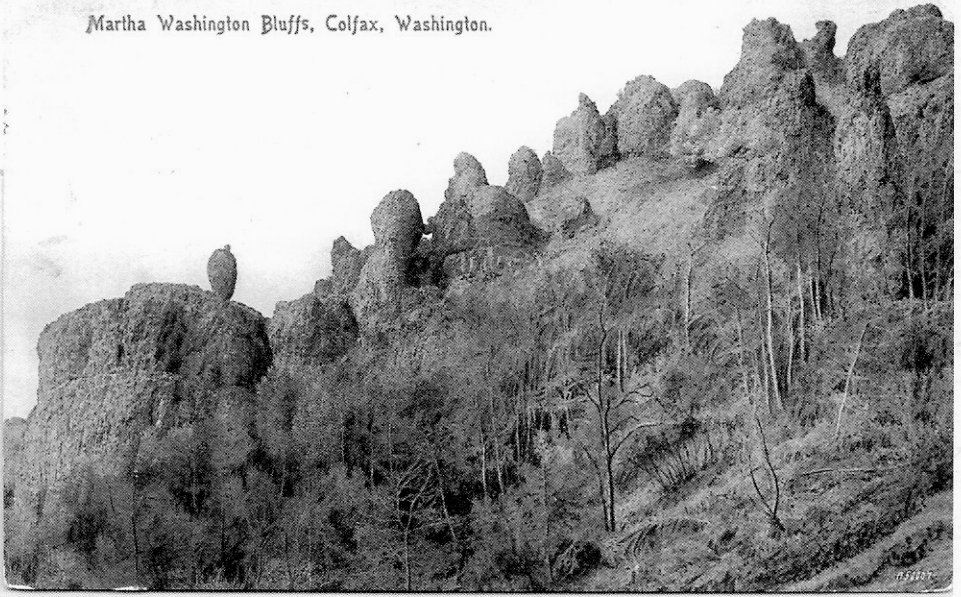
⁵ Bert Webber, *Postmarked Washington*, Volume I, Ye Galleon Press, Fairfield, Wash., 1987: 279.

⁶ This firm was also involved with the production of many early 20th century postcards of the Pacific Northwest, including some of the “official view” postcards made for the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle.

⁷ Edith Erickson, *Colfax 100 Plus*, privately printed, 1981, pp. 172-175.



Martha Washington Bluffs, Colfax, Washington.



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