

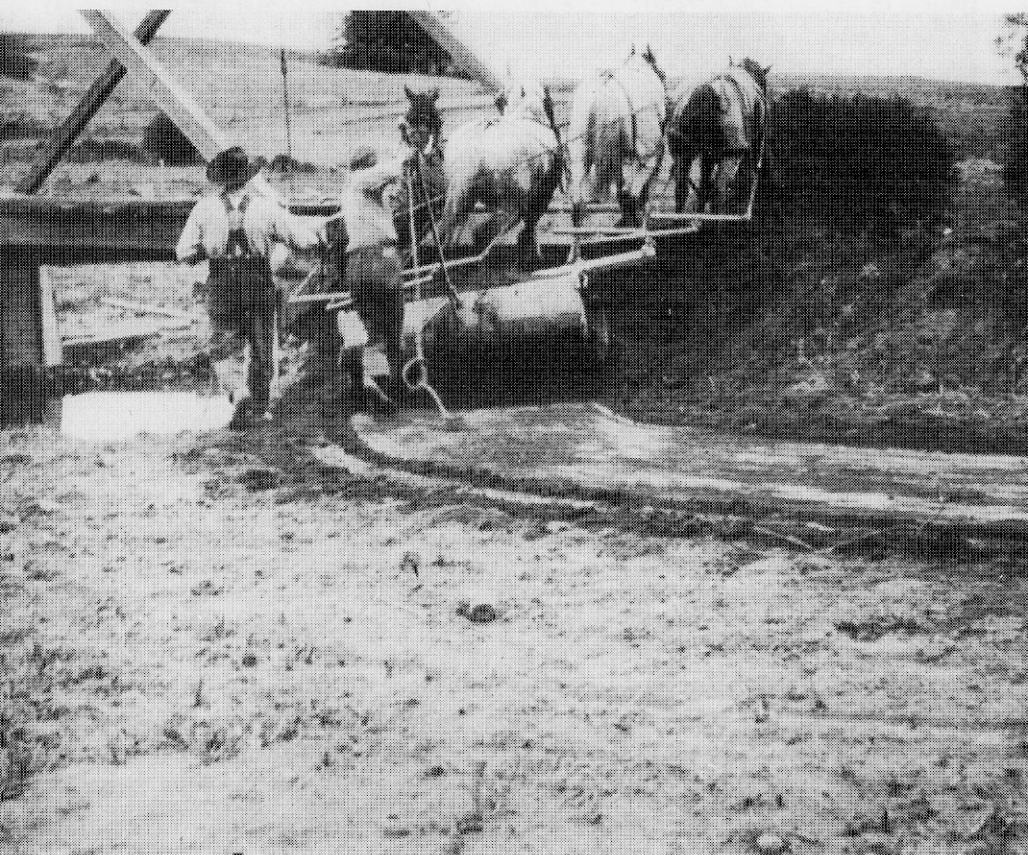


The Bunchgrass Historian

Volume 6, No. 4

Winter 1978

Making the Journey Easier —The Road Builders—



—Roy Davis Photo

Grading the approaches, 1924. (L.) Orrie Hatley, (R.) Roy Davis

Published quarterly in March, June, September and December during the calendar year by the Whitman County Historical Society, at P.O. Box 67, Colfax, Washington 99111 to further an interest in a rich and wonderful heritage by sharing memories of those days of early settlement in the bunchgrass country. Subscription-member rates are \$5.00 year.

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From the New Editor

Even though I made the layouts on each of the issues of the **Bunchgrass Historian** since its publication was started in March, 1973, it is with some trepidation and certainly with humility that I take over the role of Editor from June Crithfield. Under her direction, the **Historian** has gained a local and national reputation as a quality historical periodical which has brought credit to her and to each of the others of us who are members of the Whitman County Historical Society. It is my earnest desire to do as well as June has done.

In this Issue

This issue has been designed to report on the early efforts to produce good all-weather roads in place of the muddy and all-too-often dusty trails from the farm to town and from one town to another in the Palouse. Also, described are the evolutionary steps taken by one farm family from the use of wood planking to modern precast concrete slabs to bridge a creek. That the effort to produce good roads was not universally acclaimed to be beneficial is also presented.

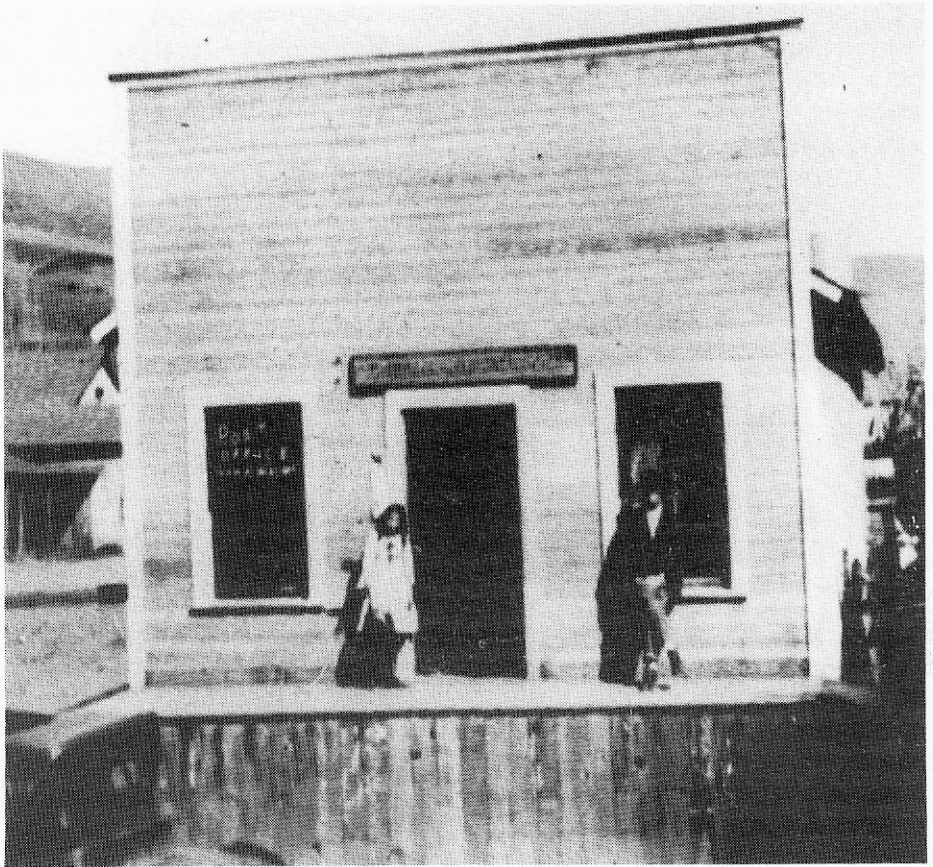
In Forthcoming Issues

Present plans for forthcoming issues call for stories and photographs dealing with mining and minerals, including pottery and brick clays; the early pioneer photographers, the pioneer woman's daily life in the settlements, and on the farm, and immigrants and ethnic groups. Readers having stories, anecdotes and/or photographs related to these topics are urged to submit them to be considered for publication in the **Bunchgrass Historian**.

Please send communications relating to the **Bunchgrass Historian** to Roy M. Chatters, SW 240 Blaine, Pullman, WA 99163 or call (509) 567-3475.

Old Hill Road to Wawawai

There are no class of individuals who enjoy a pleasant ride more than the newspaper fraternity, and when one of the physicians of Colfax drove up to the hotel last Monday morning with his gay team and invited us to take a ride with him, we gladly accepted, hardly knowing where we were going or when returning.



—June Crithfield Photo

The old Wawawai Store

Our trip was up Rebel and Union Flats, over a beautiful farming country, past pleasant looking homes, and larger fields that had lately been relieved of bountiful crops. Turning toward the Snake river, we passed the Duff Bros. ranch, near which we found Richard and Tom Duff, T. Tom and Mr. Bishop, at work with two yoke of cattle, grading a new road which is intended to be the future county road from Wawawai to Colfax. A petition will be presented to the county commissioners at the November term of court, and when the viewers appointed they should at least consider the labor already performed by the above named gentlemen. In conversation with Mr. Richard Duff, he stated that he raised this year on his farm, at the head of Almota, one hundred and fifty bushels of flax on six acres. It is but a short ride from here to the top of the hill looking down on Wawawai. For some time before reaching the hill we heard at short intervals, a loud report which sounded like a

cannon, which was not explained until we saw Mr. I. C. Matheny with a force of nine men, at work blasting the great boulders, plowing and grading a road down the great hill to the future town of Wawawai. it was about 7 o'clock when we arrived at Mr. Matheny's house, hungry and tired, where we enjoyed a good supper prepared by Mrs. Matheny and her pleasant daughters, after which Mr. Matheny completed our happiness by producing a fine example of "homemade" smoking tobacco, grown and cured by himself. We were also shown a fine example of sorghum syrup manufactured by Mr. Matheny on his place. In the morning we took a stroll about "town." At present there is not much of a metropolitan appearance about it, having but recently been surveyed, and as yet the moccasin track and camp fire of the Indians are scarcely gone out where now

"Behind the scared squaws birch canoe
The steamers smokes and raves;
And village lots are staked for sale
Above old Indian graves."

The townsite of Wawawai contains three hundred acres of the finest kind of land, on which can be grown nearly every plant indigenous to tropical climates. Of the remarkable vegetable growth, we saw Lombard poplar planted last spring from cuttings, now eight feet tall, a peach tree, one year from planting raised this year a bushel of peaches, squashes weighing 50 pounds each, a stalk of volunteer hemp eleven feet tall, cotton, hops, flowers, etc. Of the buildings already built, are three dwelling houses, warehouse, blacksmith shop, and some minor one. Hawley Dodd & Co. will commence on their warehouse immediately, it is to be 36 x 100 feet; other buildings will soon follow. A school will also be in progress during the winter. Wawawai is a natural point for receiving and discharging freight and passengers for the South Palouse country, and as soon as the boats begin to run in the spring there will be a regular passenger line from the boats to Palouse City and Colfax.

That Wawawai has natural advantages which will in the near future make it a commercial town, there can be scarcely a doubt, and we expect to see, not too many years hence, walls of brick and mortar where now are the rude huts, the salmon house and the final resting place of Poor Lo.

Our visit here was a most pleasant one, and the handsome bouquet that Miss Lottie, daughter of Mr. Matheny, presented to us as we left will be a gentle reminder of the occasion.

In returning we came over the new grade at Wawawai, ours being the first team that had crossed. □

Palouse Gazette (Colfax)

Footnote: The **Palouse Gazette** was the first paper published in Whitman County. The above story is from Volume 1, No. 4 of this pioneer newspaper, now the **Colfax Gazette**, 1877.

The New Year's festival is an inn which folks reach at the end of a long journey. They sit a while and are merry. They take up their journey again. —Anonymous

Automobile is a Detriment to Road Building

AUTOISTS AROUSE FARMERS

It is an unfortunate and regrettable condition that finds the traditional dislike and opposition of the farmers for the automobile extending to the degree that the farmers now actually oppose the improvement of roads in their district for the reason that it would make them more attractive for the autoists. That this state of affairs exists to a considerable extent in Washington is vouched for by State Highway Commissioner Snow, and has been evidenced in the same direction in various other states.

Instead of being a detriment to road improvement, the automobile ought to be a potent factor for better roads, and it is up to the autoists by showing the utmost consideration for the farmers and all travelers of the country roads, to remove the grounds for complaint and dissipate the prejudice prevailing among the country people. The farmers, many of them, Highway Commissioner Snow declares, have no disposition to spend their money upon the improvement of the road, when the sole result will be that the auto owners will monopolize the road to the practical exclusion of the men who spend their money and do the work. They declare that the autoists hog the roads, driving at high speed, turning out but slightly or not at all for other occupants, frighten horses and threaten danger of collision, forcing the farmers to take other poorer roads less popular with the auto drivers. The reckless-

ness and selfishness but serves to increase the resentment, natural enough perhaps, aroused by the impression of aggressiveness and power produced by the whizzing cars of the modern luxurious method of road travel.

That the farmers have considerable just cause for complaint is unquestionable. The earlier feeling of envy, distrust and fear of accident, held by the farmers, however, would soon die out were the autoists to show a judicious consideration of teams and pedestrians by modifying their speed and fully extending all courtesies of road travel. The auto owners should hasten the day of a better feeling between themselves and the farmers, for co-operation in the good roads movement.

The autoists, who may be said to generally represent the financial and business interests, are in position, with the rapid increase in this mode of travel throughout the country, to be a powerful factor in the good roads movement, and, with the sympathy and backing of the farmers, the united forces would encourage road improvement to a great extent. In the light of the present active opposition of the farmers to the improvement of their own roads, the matter assumes a serious phase, and one which should be given serious consideration by auto owners. It is to be hoped that the present differences between city and country on this score may witness an early adjustment, not only in Washington but throughout the whole country.

—Olympia Recorder.

Reprinted in the **Palouse Republic**, August 10, 1906.



Smoothing out the bridge approach, Roy Davis driving.

—Roy Davis photo

Building a Private Bridge Across Union Flat Creek

by Roy Davis

The first bridge across Union Flat Creek to our old place was built with 12" x 12" x 16' mud sills, short 12" x 12" uprights and 12" x 12" x 16' timbers on top to make the piers. There were five at first, one 35 feet across the main stream, two twenty feet apart and two twelve feet apart. The bridge was almost 100 feet long and 16 feet wide. There were two 8" x 8" pieces that made a "V" with a 6" x 6" piece across the top with a 6" x 6" piece under the center of the first span and a square rod that held the two 6" x 6" pieces together. Also, there were two metal pieces bolted to the bridge for the bottom of the 8" x 8" pieces that formed the "V" to sit in.

Part of the bridge washed out in 1910 during the bad flood of that year so we couldn't cross it except on horse back. While it was out, we used to cross it on an old mule which had to jump up to get onto the bridge. Sometimes two of us rode her and would slide back digging our heels in her flanks as she jumped up. She would kick up when she got onto the bridge, sometimes throwing us off.

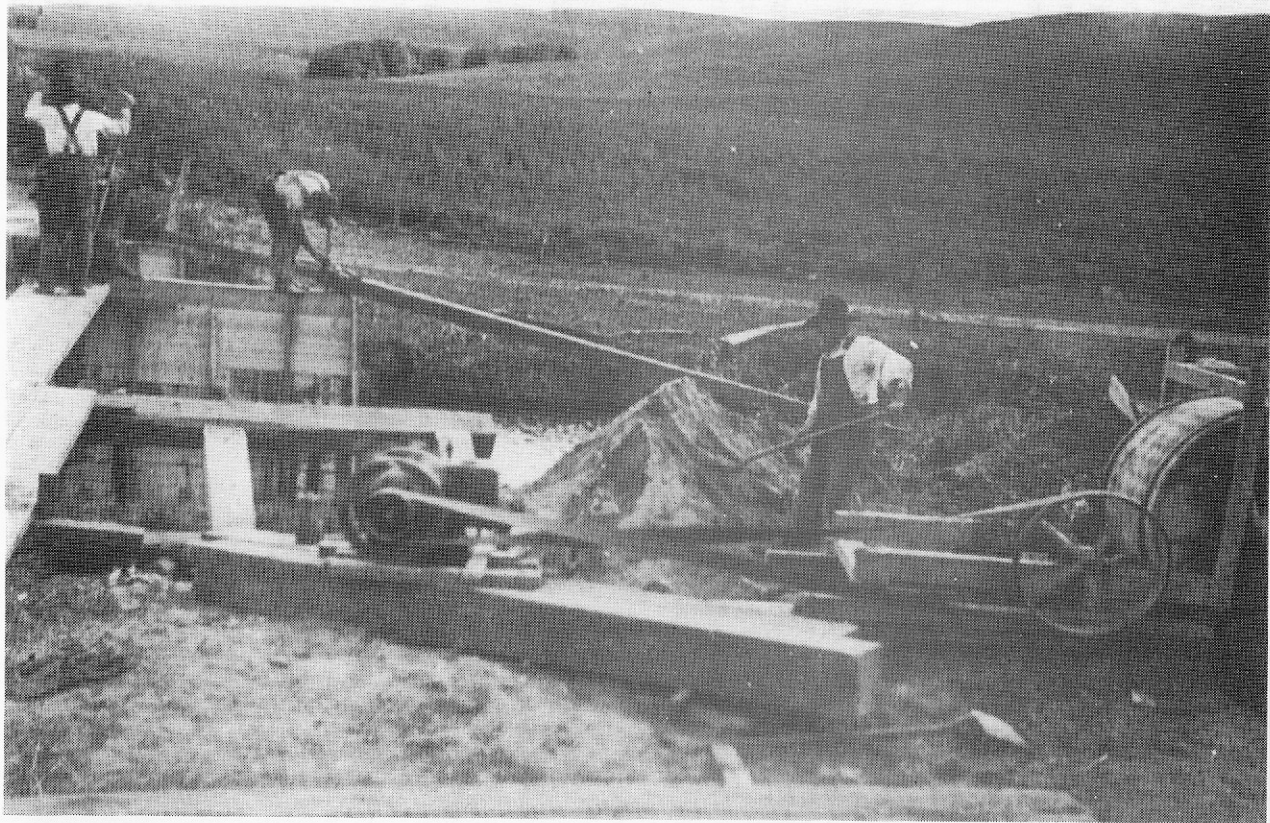
When Dad rebuilt it in 1912, he had some men helping him. He asked them to carry a 12" x 12" x 16' long piece and put it on to the bridge, but they said they couldn't carry it. He said, "Hell, I can!" And he did, but I thought his legs would bend double while he carried it about thirty feet.

In 1924, we tore the old bridge out and rebuilt it using timbers cut at the Felton mill located just outside of Troy, Idaho. My brother, Claude, Landon Hatley and I went after it; Claude and Landon had four-horse teams and I had a six-horse team. We stayed up overnight where there was just room in the barn for our teams and as there was another man up there after a load of wood I held my team outside the barn until Claude, who was behind me, could get his team into the barn. The other man had to tie his horses outside.

We tied the four 12" x 12" x 35' long pieces on Landon's wagon and had to go out another road east of the mill as he couldn't make the turns the way we came. He only had the running gears on his wagon and had to tie the hounds of the back wheels up to the timbers. Claude hauled the other 12" x 12"s to make the piers and I hauled the bridge planks. I had a big load which I tied down with a log chain and a jin pole which was 4" x 6" about 16 feet long. I took a roll over a small log and tied it down behind with wire which when I hit a hole in the road broke and that 4" x 6" timber flipped over forward onto the wagon seat beside me.

At supper that night after we had gotten home, we got to talking and decided to put another 12" x 12" x 35' timber across the channel. Art Busby was working for me and I asked him if he could get it in a day's time; he said he couldn't. I said I could, so we called the mill people who said they would have another one sawed. I left home at five o'clock in the morning with a two-horse team and running gear of an iron-wheeled wagon on which I had tied some feed for the horses and a bag of chop which I sat on. I arrived at the mill thirty-one miles away five and a half hours later. My wagon was coupled out about twenty feet with most of the weight

Footnote: Roy Davis is a retired farmer still living on the homestead farm on Union Flat.



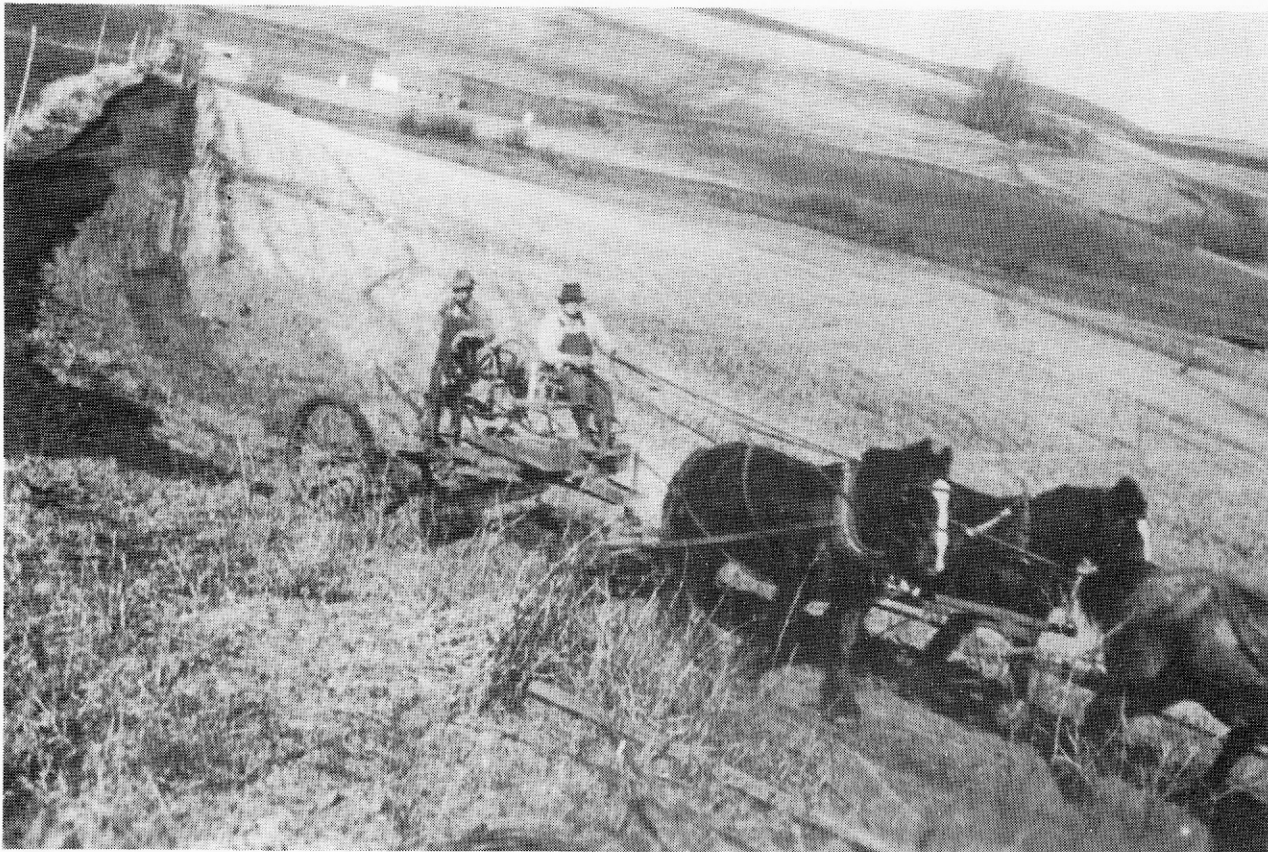
—Roy Davis Photo

Mixing concrete for the piers. (L. to R.), Roy Davis, Avery McInturff, William J. Davis, father of Roy Davis.



—Roy Davis Photo

Making concrete in a barrel mixer fabricated by Avery McInturff. (L. to R.), W. Davis, Hugh Davis, Roy Davis, with wheel barrow above. Others unidentified.



—Roy Davis Photo

Cutting down the hill with an old grader. Driving is Orrie Hattley with Roy Davis behind.

on the rear axle. I sat on the front end of the timber and it spanked me all the way home! I stopped at noon just a little way from the Moscow golf course, fed and watered the horses and had a little lunch. After eating, I hooked up and just inside Washington, on the old sand road, stopped and fed again. I finally arrived home at nine that night after a long, hard day.

Dad hired Avery McInturff to put in the concrete piers, the two across the main stream were four feet thick at the base and tapered to one foot at a height of seven feet. The others were two feet thick at the base and tapered to one foot at seven



Grading the hill (L. to R.), Orrie Hatley and Roy Davis.

—Roy Davis Photo

feet. We shortened the bridge by twelve feet and put 12" x 12" x 16' timbers on top of the concrete to put the bridge stringers on. We hauled sand and gravel from the South Palouse river by team for use in making the concrete.

Across the piers we put two stringers side by side on which to wheel the concrete which my brother Claude and I did all day long using iron-wheeled wheel barrows. Making the hard day's work harder was the necessity of pushing our loads up an incline before getting on to the stringers. Avery mixed the cement in a barrel mixer which he had made. My dad said, "That bridge will outlast me." It about did.

I rebuilt the bridge in 1946, shortened it another twelve feet and still used the same concrete piers. Nine 8" x 16" x 35" timbers were cut at a small mill east of Viola, Idaho at a cost of \$400 (\$35 per thousand board feet) plus \$30.00 delivery charge. These timbers were put across the channel of the creek and the bridge put up pretty fast. As there was a steep hill on the south side of the bridge, I cut it down with a Slip scraper and Fresnoes to make a better grade. There were several times over the years when it was necessary to poke ice from under the bridge to keep it from washing out.

In July of this year (1978), we put in a concrete bridge using beans 56 feet long by five feet, four inches wide which were fabricated in Spokane. It cost us \$16,000. Because of concern that the old piers would not bear the weight, two new ones had to be built along with a temporary bridge to put the crane on during assembly of the new beans. The assembly crew came down about 8:00 a.m. and had the bridge all in and were gone by noon.

I hope this bridge will last me. □



—Roy Davis Photo

Prestressed concrete span being put in place in July 1978, a far cry from the timbers originally brought here to cross the creek before 1910, and much costlier.



STATE OF WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR
OLYMPIA

November 2, 1915.

Mr. Geo. C. Jewett, President,
Chamber of Commerce,
Palouse, Washington.

My dear Mr. Jewett:-

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of October 30th, in relation to the construction of the Eastern Division of the Inland Empire Highway.

Regarding this matter I beg to say that it will be impossible, as stated by Mr. Roy, to begin work on the highway until next Spring. As you are aware the appropriation for State highways comes from two annual levies. The Highway Commission has crowded to completion a great deal of work this year so that on Saturday last the State Highway fund was overdrawn \$10,066.11. There are further estimates that will come in for work done during the present year that will cause the overdraft to grow until the period arrives when taxes will again be paid in.

The intention now is to lay out the work to be done next summer and the engineering force will be used for this purpose during the winter months so that contracts can be awarded in the early spring. I may say that there is no question whatever but that the work provided for on the Eastern Division of the Inland Empire Highway will be completed during next year.

Thanking you for your letter, I am,

Yours very truly,

Ernest Lister
Governor.



—Lenora Torgeson Photo

Lenora and Harvey Barr with team used in road construction. The horses weighed a ton each and attracted much attention.

Tales of an Early Road Builder

by

Lenora Harvey (Barr) Torgeson

as told to Kay Kenedy Turner

In the first place, my first husband, Harvey Barr, took in at the ranch a partner, Charlie McKenzie, a Colfax banker who also worked for the Highway Construction Company. He got interested in it, dragged Harvey in and then Charlie was out. So we ran as Campbell (another partner) and Barr for awhile and pretty quick Mr. Barr took it over himself. We built more roads than any other one outfit in the Pacific Northwest at that time.

He started along about 1919, on the Lewiston hill I think, but I'm not positive because I wasn't in on that. He built the Lewiston hill under Van Ardsdale who was the engineer on that job. His monument is there, part way up the hill. Then we built from Central Ferry to Dusty, including the Central Ferry grade. A lot of this we graded as well as surfaced.

The grading was done with horses, we've had as high as a hundred mules out on the grades. It was done, instead of using this big equipment, with four mules on a fresno. Well, first I should say—the plow was used, a big heavy plow which was made like a walking plow, but much heavier. They'd break the ground with this big heavy plow and four horses—four horses that weighed a ton each! The driver weighed two hundred and fifty pounds and the plow-shaker weighed about two hundred and eighty. We've had people drive along the road and stop and take pictures of those people; that big team and those two big men were quite an attraction.

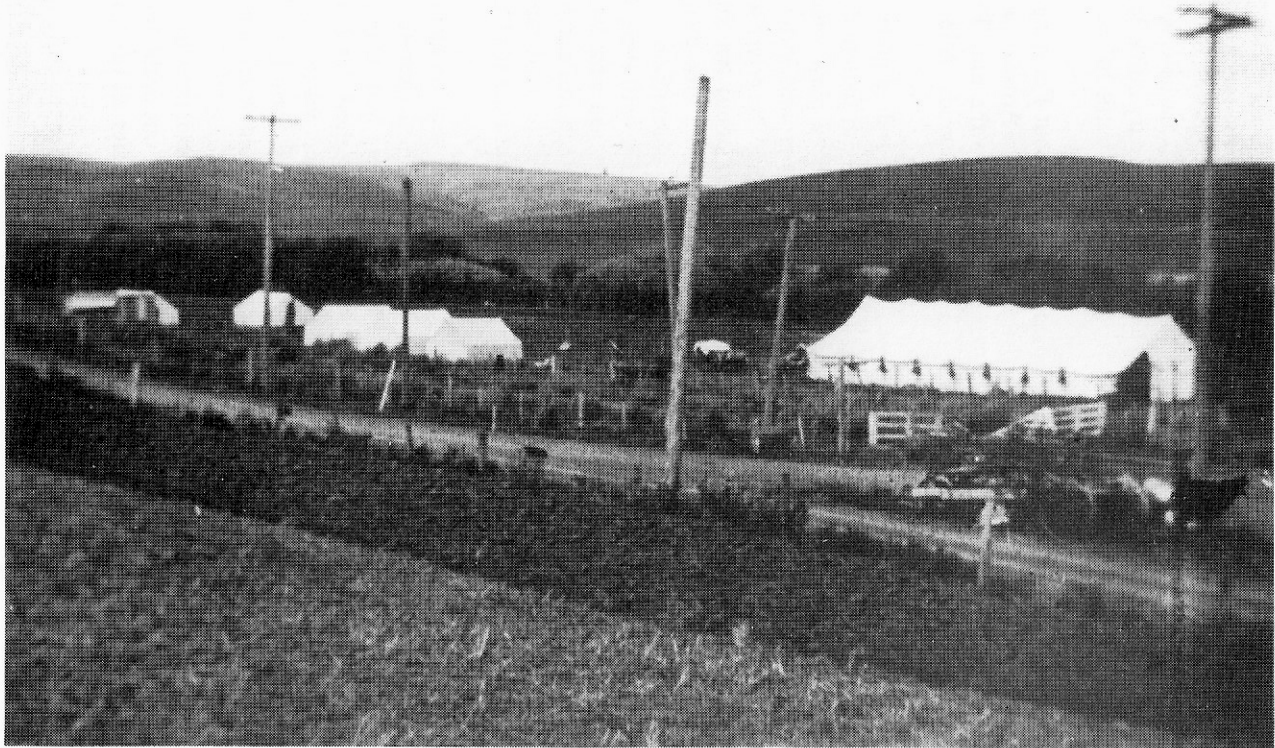
They had scoops, called Fresnos, and they'd pick up the dirt with these fresnos and haul it from the cuts into the fills. If it was a long haul we had what we called "wheelers," a wheeled arrangement attached to the Fresno, which made it possible to scoop up a load and then with the aid of the wheels move the load rapidly to the dumping spot. Also, with the crew, were engineers who staked the road site and we had to bring the road up to grade.

We lived in tents and had a great big cookhouse. I think that cookhouse was fourteen by twenty-four, the men ate in that and we built a little lean-to for the kitchen. Two big, long tables went right down through that big tent. On one side we had cupboards built and the sink was there to wash the dishes. For hot water we had just a fifty gallon barrel fixed up to heat water from the hot water front in the stove. Almost always we had water piped into the house, if it wasn't, we had it close so it wasn't hard to get. But nearly always we had the cold water piped into the cookhouse.

For the men to wash we set a big sink out in the yard and they had towels and everything. They could come and get a bucket of hot water out of the hot water barrel and that water was always hot, we just really had hot water all the time, but we had to dip it out of the barrel!

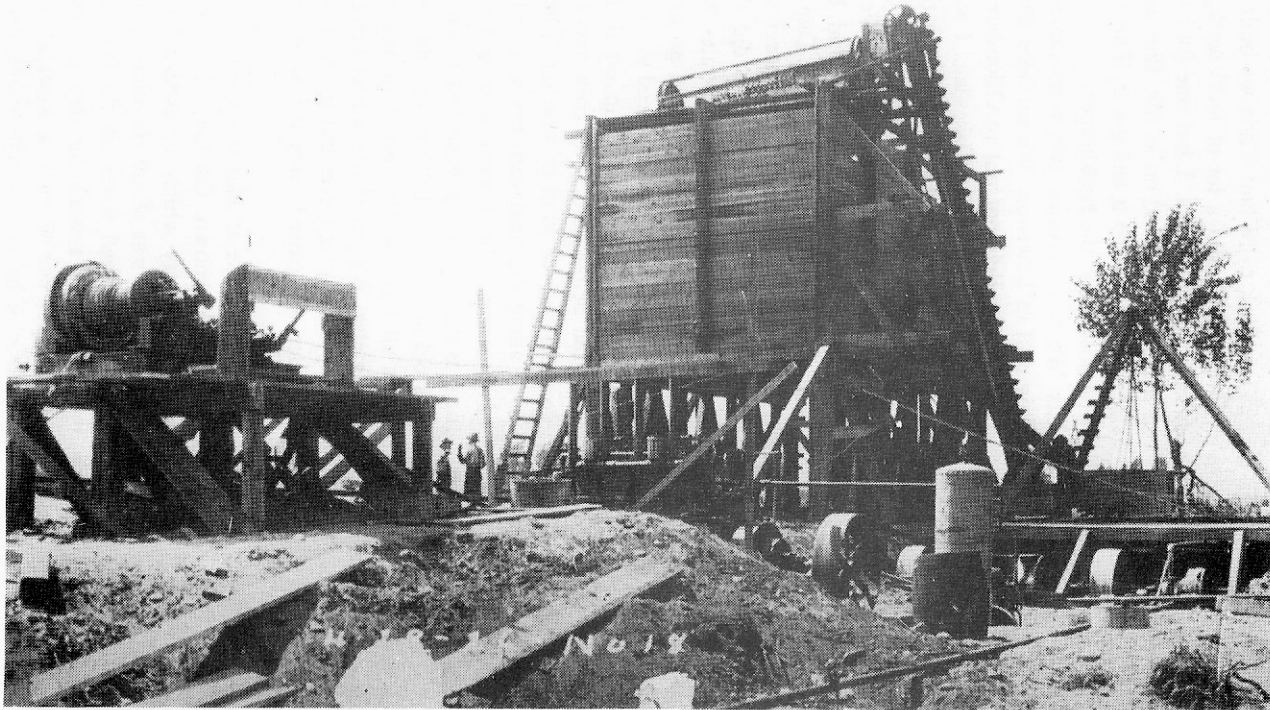
It was hot cooking. We just had the little lean-to with room for the stove and the hot water barrel and wood or coal at the one end of the stove. Then we had these big tables and the cooking layout and we could wash dishes along the side that way.

Footnote: Lenora was born near Potlatch, Idaho in 1897 and came to Whitman County in 1901 where she has resided ever since. She's the author of a book about her family's early years titled **Snake River Hills**.



—Lenora Torgeson Photo

Road Construction Camp



—Lenora Torgeson Photo

Crusher for road construction between Pullman and Palouse, 1924.

If the crew got too big we had a man cook. We fed as many as a hundred men and we had a man cook and a flunky. I'd go to town and do the buying. But if it got down to anywhere around twenty-five I'd do the cooking.

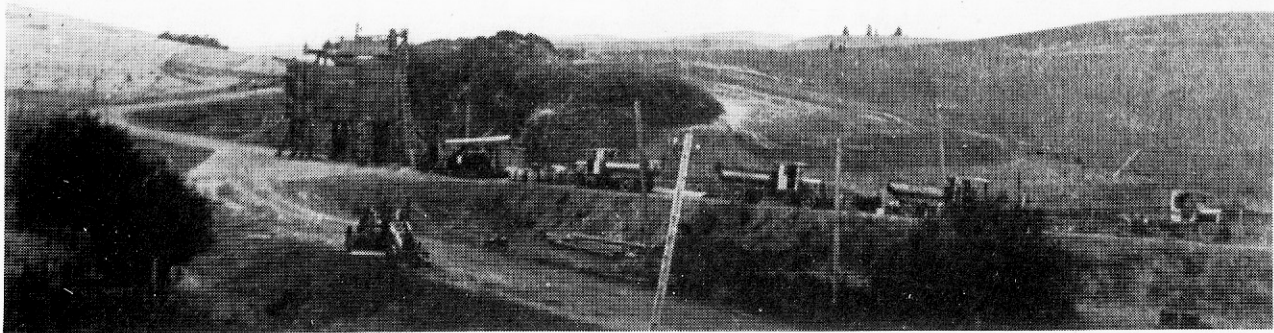
We worked three different years up in Spokane County, one was around Rockford, we called it Belle, one was from Deep Creek across to Nine Mile, and the other was up at Deer Park—from Deer Park to Milan. Then we built fifty miles of the John Day highway down in Oregon. We did a lot of local work, including in Colfax where we built and surfaced a lot of streets. I bid one job! One little job there in Colfax, James Street, which I graded and bid on as Mr. Barr and all of them had gone bidding another job so I came up and bid it and got it. They always kidded me and said my job made money because I was the bookkeeper.

We built lots and lots of roads. We had a crusher two years down at Lewiston, we crushed all the rock for that big mill in Lewiston. We surfaced from Palouse to Pullman, from Tekoa to Farmington, from Belmont out to Oakesdale; my first job of cooking in camp was out on the job from Belmont to Oakesdale. I was camped out of Oakesdale and then I moved about a mile out of Tekoa and from then on it was regular.

It took us about six months to surface the road from Central Ferry to Dusty. We'd had the men setting up the crusher and everything before hand, but we moved in on the 4th of July and surfaced the fifty miles of the John Day highway and moved out on Thanksgiving Day. We started the crusher and never stopped it day or night, ran it twenty-four hours a day, of course, we always did that. But with horses and mules you could only work so long. Boy, those mules would tell you when it was five minutes to twelve—the awfulest noise would go up! Every mule would start to braying at five minutes to twelve. We didn't need any noon whistle!

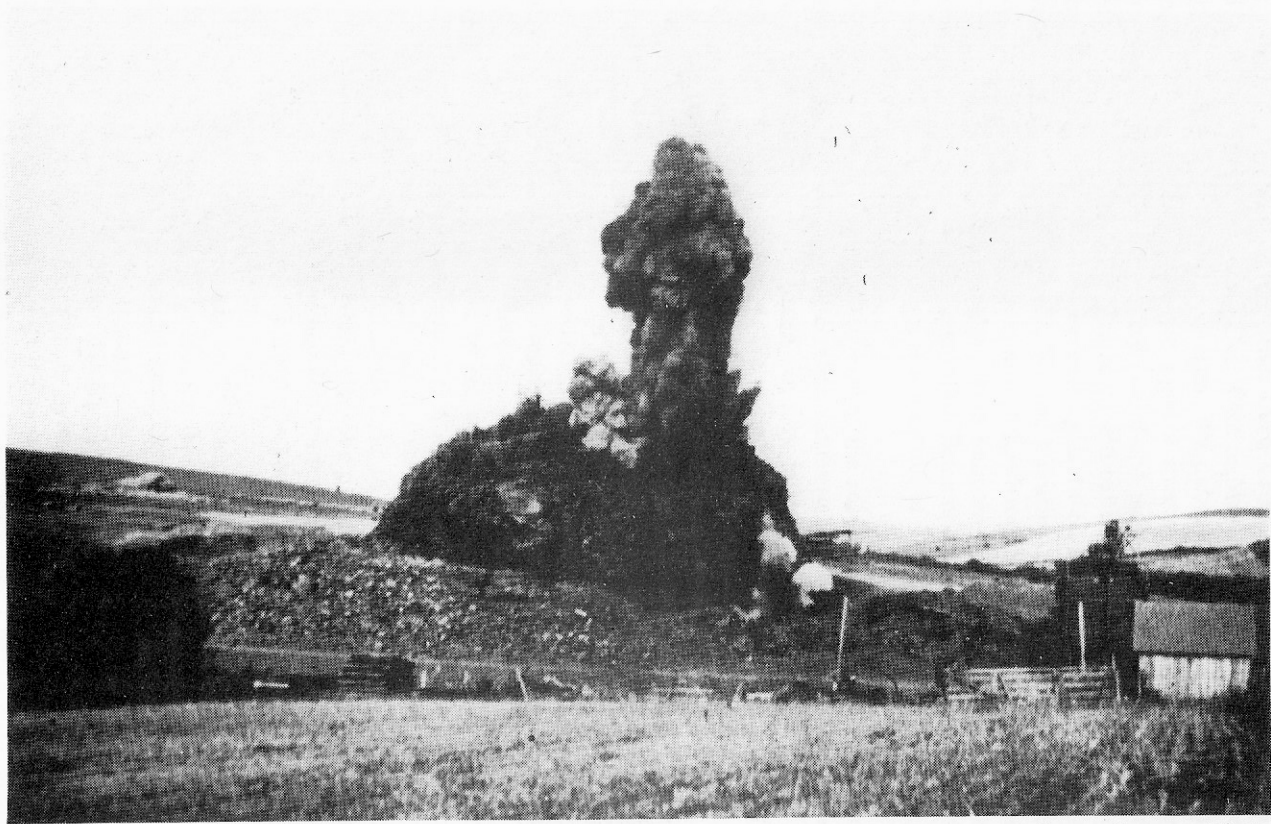
We lived in tents even at ten below zero; we were up on that Deep Creek road in Spokane County and it was ten below zero. The crew was cut down to a minimum because we couldn't do much in that kind of weather. There was an old lady, Grandma Hibenger, who lived along the road with her son and she sent him over to tell me that she wanted to see me. So I went over and nothing would do but we had to move in with them as they had a big bunk house that the men could sleep in. She was over eighty years old and she said, "You can do the cooking and we'll eat with you." That suited us all right so we moved in and they furnished the milk and we furnished everything else. We put in the winter there and when we left the old lady just cried, "The happiest winter I ever put in in my life." We'd go back once a year and see her and when she passed away it was at her request that Mr. Barr was a pall bearer.

Almost every job that we were on we made at least one friend that lasted years, one such was Mr. Shannon, first name unknown. On the John Day highway job in Oregon the state had condemned his quarry which we needed for the rock. Because it was so close to his water supply he was afraid the blasting would lose his water. I didn't blame him, either. He furnished water for the big ranch which he pumped up on the hill, coming there twice a week for that purpose. It was the best quarry, so the state condemned it. He was so mad he wouldn't have a thing to say to anybody or do anything. Well, after he saw we didn't ruin his spring, I'd go up and talk to him. He'd bring his lunch and pump all day and I'd say, "Mr. Shannon, there's not need you bringing your lunch down here, come down to the cookhouse and eat." I got him so he'd eat at the cookhouse and after a day or two he said, "You know, if you'll have some more of those good muffins for supper I'll stay for



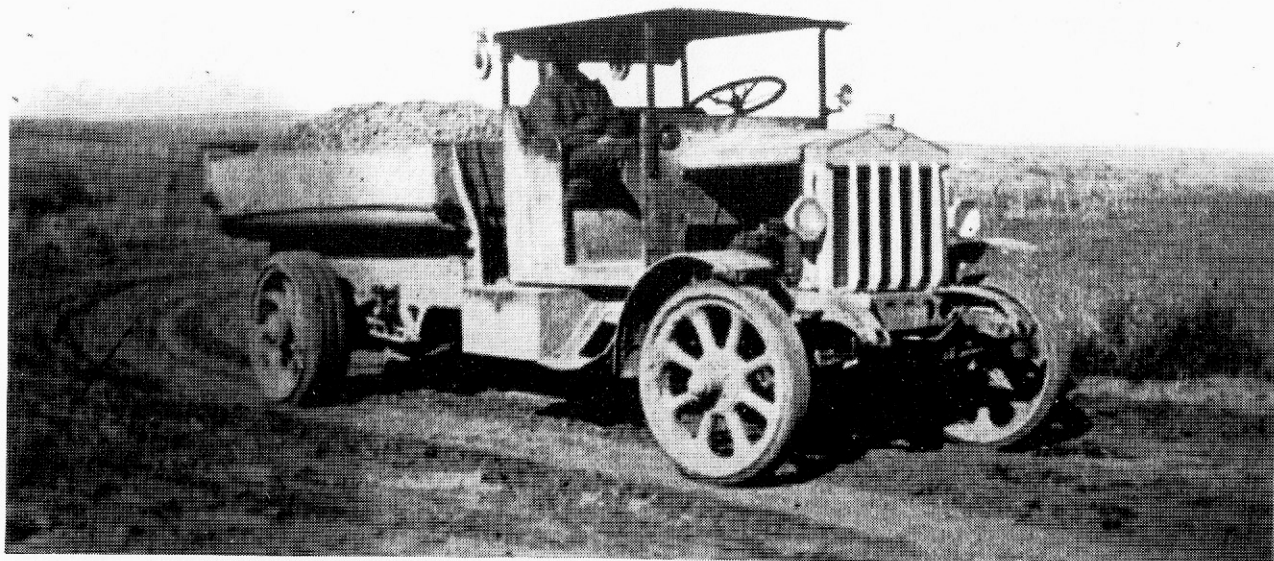
—Lenora Torgeson Photo

Pullman to Palouse job, 32,000 yards, 1924.



Blasting, about one mile north of Pullman, 1924.

—Lenora Torgeson Photo



—Lenora Torgeson Photo

Heavy truck used in road construction.

supper.” We just got to be the best of friends. At the time the quarry was condemned there was an Oregon state requirement that we’d have to fence that quarry with great big posts set in concrete. It would cost us five hundred dollars to fence it so when we left there Mr. Shannon said, “You people have been so nice to me I’ll sign that release and I’ll do that work later.”

You go back there now and you’ll find that he never did any of the fencing work. He was so nice, he enjoyed being there, watching the men work and everything and everybody treated him nice. He told the boys, “If you want to drink a little beer, hang it in the spring (the spring was concreted up) that’ll make it nice and cool.” So, we made a good friend there.

When we left there Thanksgiving Day nobody owed us a penny and we didn’t owe anybody else a penny. We went over on Crooked River and bought twelve hundred head of yearling ewes and shipped them to the ranch in the Hay-Riparia area with money we made off of that job. We had an old couple living there so the children could go with us whenever they wanted to or they could go home to the ranch and live with these people. We would let them do as they pleased about it so sometimes Virginia changed schools as much as four times in one year.

As for wages and salaries, the truck drivers got about five dollars a day, fifty cents an hour for ten hour days. The cooks, whenever we hired a cook, got a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month and we worked seven days a week, actually night and day as we never stopped. We’d have to fix lunches for the night crew and sometimes, if it was cold, we’d let them come to the cookhouse to eat their midnight lunch. Nearly always when I cooked I’d have a pot of hot stew on the stove for their midnight snack. One time I left Pendleton, Oregon, (you know our cars didn’t drive so fast those days) at eight o’clock in the evening and I drove in down below Condon at midnight just as they were eating their supper there.

Another time when we were preparing to go to another job but hadn’t yet moved our crew and equipment I drove into Arlington about eight o’clock at night to eat. Virginia, who was little at the time, was with me and as we went I saw four men and it flashed through my mind, ‘There’s four bad looking men,’ but I didn’t think any more about it at the moment. But, when we came back out after our supper these four men were sitting there in a car on the street and as I pulled out, they pulled out right behind me. When I stopped up at the station to service I discovered I just had one light burning and since I was going out on a narrow grade I figured I’d better fix it. The attendant said he didn’t have any bulb but the garage was open so he sent me down there for one. There was a “Y” in Arlington and you could go one way to come up the Columbia River or out the other way to go to Condon which I was headed for. Well, as I drove out of Arlington, this car was sitting right in the junction. Then I got scared! But it was too late, so I tore out of there just as fast as I could with them behind me. It’s pretty isolated country so I drove that car just as fast as it would go. Since I always carried a six-shooter, Virginia didn’t think anything about it until I told her to get it out and lay it on the seat beside me. Then she got scared. The men in the other car followed us out of Arlington for about twenty miles but I simply ran off and left them as I had a better car, a Buick roadster and I put her to the floorboard. I was afraid they would shoot my gas tank, tires or something. Was I scared!

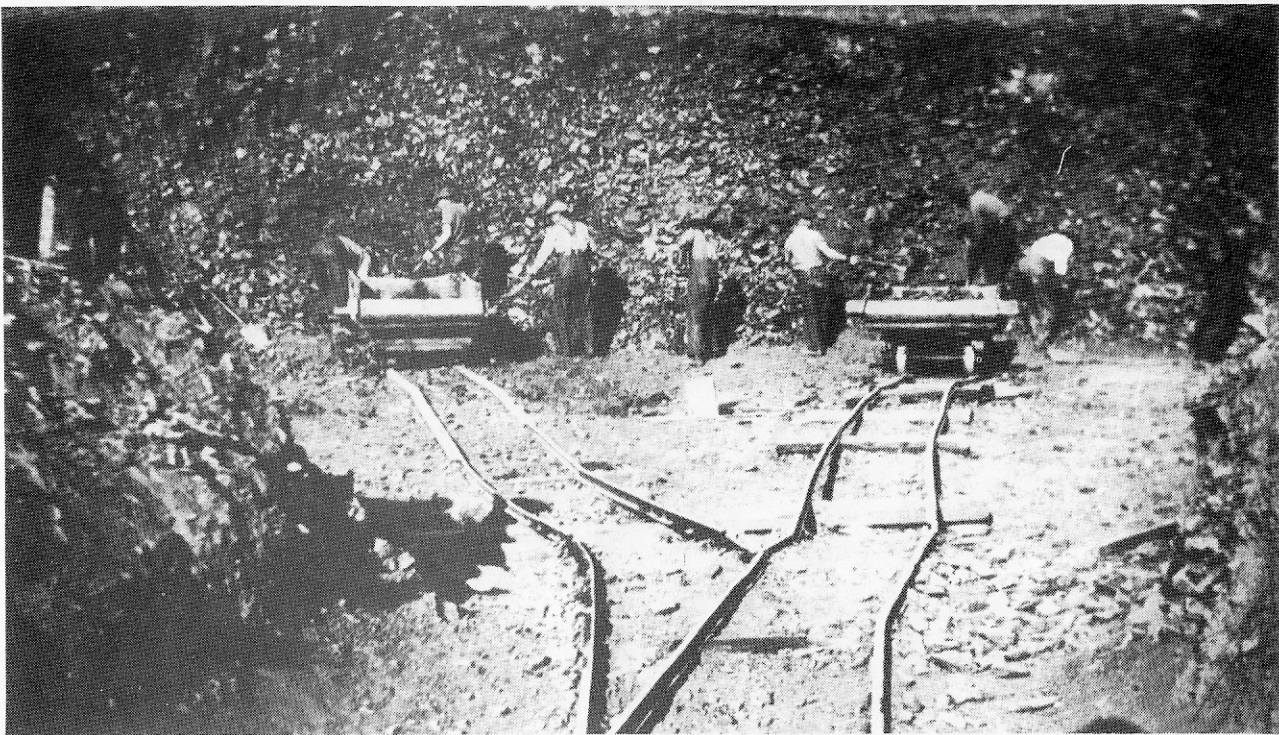
I bet I’ve drive more miles than any other one woman in the Pacific Northwest. Mr. Barr always had me drive for him. □



—Marian Wise Photo

Big Bertha Loading Up

This photograph and the one on the following page were furnished by Mrs. Marian Wise, whose father, _____ Hinchliff, shown above, was an early Whitman County road commissioner.



Loading aggregate for the road bed.

—Marian Wise Photo