

Bunchgrass Historian



**Whitman County Historical Society
Colfax, Washington**

Volume 29
Number 3
2003



Wheat, World War I, and the Business of Farming

Pullman's Old Post Office

Memories of Wartime Pullman

Whitman County Historical Society

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www.wsu.edu/~sarek/wchs.html

Current Issues \$4.00

Back Issues (Vol. 1-20) \$2.50

Cover Photo: Surplus wheat from the 1909 harvest was piled in the corral on the Oregon-Washington Railway and Navigation Company right-of-way at Endicott.



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Andrew Duffin received a Ph.D. in American and Environmental History from WSU in 2003. He has taught at both Central Washington University and Western Washington University. This article is derived from a chapter of his dissertation, *Fill the Earth and Subdue It: The Environmental Consequences of Intensive Agriculture in the Palouse*.

Linda Yeomans is a professional historical researcher in Spokane and was hired to prepare the successful nomination of the Old Post Office to the National Register of Historic Places. Tom Handy, owner of the building, allowed the *Bunchgrass* to publish a part of the nomination material. He has carefully restored much of the exterior of the building and has remodeled in a most sensitive way the interior for use as a wine bar. Tom Handy is currently a Board Member of the WCHS.

Lenna Harding grew up in Pullman as the daughter of the prominent Northwest Historian Herman Deutsch. She has been actively involved with the preservation of the Gladish Building in Pullman. Her story of life in Pullman during the 1940s will be continued in succeeding issues of the *Bunchgrass*.

The photographs, except where otherwise noted, are from the collections of the WCHS. Especially useful for the agricultural article were the materials of the Gordon Landeen Collection on the early history of Endicott, the Lawrence and Eva Welle materials on the Colton-Uniontown area, and the Paul Bockmier Collection of materials related to Palouse and Garfield. The Dorothy Matson Collection provided the photos of the "tractorettes."

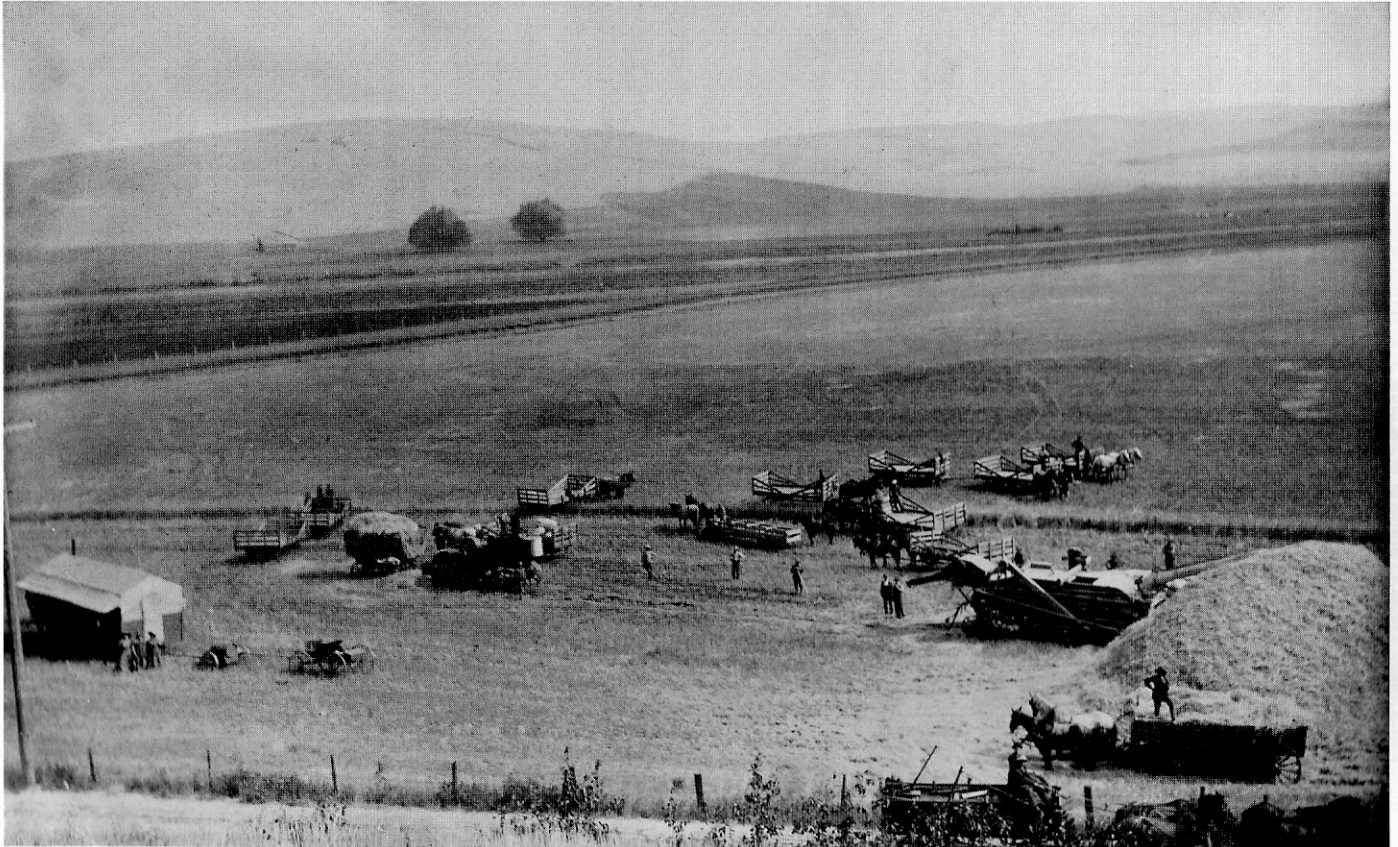


Photo taken after the completion of harvest on this farm in the Colton-Uniontown area. Note the cook wagon on the left and the straw pile on the right; between are the steam powered engine and the stationary thresher with the connecting belt removed.

WHEAT, WORLD WAR I, AND THE BUSINESS OF FARMING

By Andrew Duffin

The *Washington Farmer*, a leading weekly newspaper that catered to the agricultural community of the inland Northwest, served as a sounding board for a multitude of farming issues throughout the twentieth century. News about commodity prices, information on new equipment, and advice on wheat smut and horse colic could be found in its pages. For at least the first half of the century, it combined a homespun, commonfolk attitude with a growing awareness that being a good farmer also meant being a sharp businessman and financial tactician. The *Farmer* reflected and promoted a belief that business acumen, like the more nebulous, yet essential ideals of family and social stability, assured farm prosperity. Palouse farming in the early twentieth century was similarly torn between the desire to maintain old habits and the urge to follow new trends.

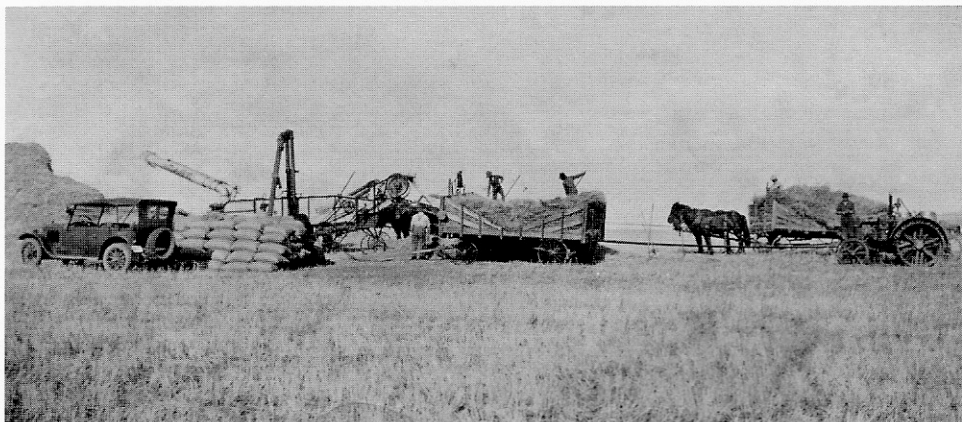
A quirky, whimsical editorial from late 1914 illustrates. The article depicts two Southern farmers contemplating the effects of the outbreak of war in Europe. “Uncle John,” a youngish, progressive farmer, reasoned that after “the Kayser got a-eachin’ fur a fight,” and after the Tsar “started to shuckin’ his coat,” that the continent would be in dire need of food imports. He had planted an assortment of food crops in anticipation of shortages abroad and the attendant price rises, and did well when it came time to sell his harvest. His companion, known simply as “the old man,” planted cotton—a decision he dearly regretted: “I acted the fool again this year an’ didn’t plant much corn, thinkin’ I’d strike it rich with a big crop o’ cotton. I made the cotton, all right, but now I can’t sell the stuff. Didn’t plant much corn, an’ the early drouth got it, an’ now it’s up to a dollar an’ a quarter a bushel an’ likely to go higher.” To his dismay, the European cotton market dried up, since “them fool furriners was so busy a-shootin’ each other that they wur a-payin’ mighty little attention to whether or not they had any clothes or not, anyway.”¹ The obvious message being sent to *Washington Farmer* readers was that diversification in food crops was the prudent course to follow during turbulent times.

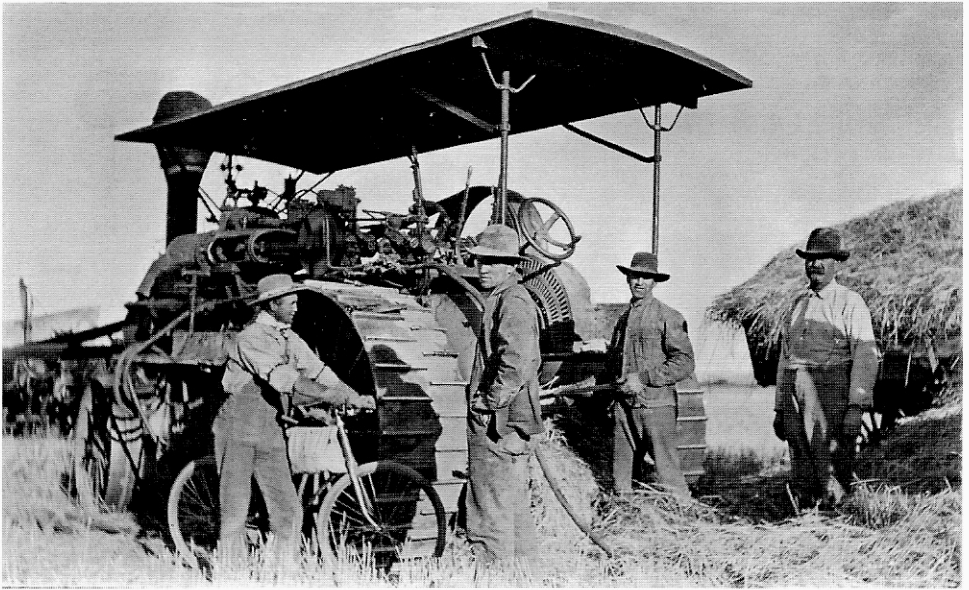
Nevertheless, for all the exposure, another set of the newspaper’s writers had other ideas. While the *Washington Farmer* printed articles on topics such as the need to diversify and the dangers of single-crop farming, it also encouraged a shift away from diversified (or “mixed”) farming toward monocropping. It called for a new breed of farmer—one who increased acreage and invested in the latest

equipment in order to take advantage of the economies of scale that large farms produced. An attraction to bigger farms and profits drew many operators away from diversification; the farmer of the future would be first and foremost a specialist in training, equipment, and crops. Trade newspapers such as the *Farmer* picked up on this trend and sang its praises.

This split personality characterized the Palouse agricultural community from 1914 through the early days of the Great Depression, but it increasingly leaned in favor of intensive, specialized farming that focused solely on wheat. The high commodity prices of 1914-1919 encouraged farmers to plant every available acre to cash in on the misfortunes of European farmers and to contribute to the American war effort. Wheat had sold at 70 to 80 cents per bushel from 1910 to 1913, a price that allowed Palouse farmers to prosper.² Farmers from all over the U.S. enjoyed this “Golden Age” of agriculture; prices on most goods increased because of faster transportation links to foreign markets, immigration, and a growing domestic population. Shortly after hostilities began in Europe in late June 1914, commodity prices went on an impressive, extended upward spiral. Whitman County wheat gained 6 cents per bushel in one week in July, and continued to increase for the rest of the summer. By year’s end, it reached 92 cents, and less than two months later, certain varieties sold for \$1.40 per bushel. A 100 percent price increase in less than a year left many farmers elated (despite the dark fact that millions of dead European soldiers and civilians were the cause). The local press spoke of the “jubilant” mood in the area and reported that farmers anticipated “a still greater increase in prices as the European war cloud gains volume.”³

The overheated market gave Palouse farmers the impetus to plant more wheat. Growers in Latah County, Idaho, planted nearly twice as much wheat during the war years as in 1909. In Whitman County, the increase was less dramatic, since “King Wheat” had already dominated the landscape for some time. Still, local growers planted 28 percent more acres in 1919 than in 1909. National trends mir-





rored the Palouse situation; in every year from 1915 through 1919, American wheat farmers increased production. And prices continued their ascent. Strong demand boosted Northwest wheat to \$2 per bushel and above from 1917 through 1920.⁴ American farmers had never seen market forces work for them in such a positive way for so long a period.

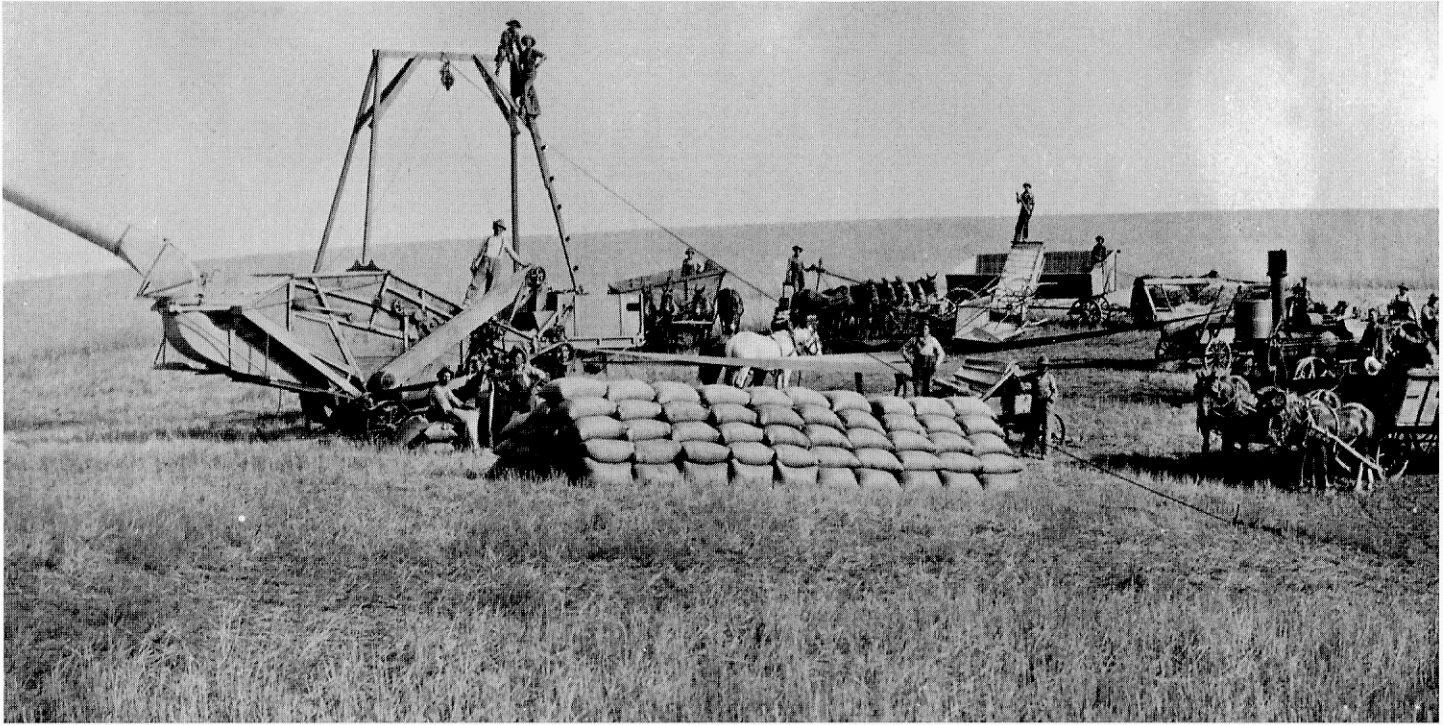
Not all agricultural interests shared in this euphoria. Some believed that the sudden surge in prices and increased acreages would hurt farmers in the long run. Henry Pope, an executive from the Farmers' Union, a lobbying group, warned that "overproduction would visit upon the nation an unwarranted calamity."⁵ The editors of the *Washington Farmer* wrote in 1914 that, in spite of high prices, "until marketing methods have been improved and readjusted more fairly, the farmer will get the short end, as usual."⁶ A year later, their defeatism tempered, the newspaper instead chose to admonish greedy farmers: "the temptation is tremendous to plant every bit of land to wheat for the sake of 'easy money.'"⁷

But the overwhelming majority of voices—even from the *Farmer*—supported efforts to maximize production. Notions about the U.S. farmers' responsibility to feed the world and slogans like "Wheat will win the war" resonated more than pessimism or ominous predictions about the future. The *Farmer* often cited the growers' need to look carefully at their land, because nearly every parcel contained some "waste" land: "It lies in the fence corners, along the ditches or around old buildings or barnyards. Very often it is the best land on the place, at least after having lain idle for years. It ought to be put to work. There is profit in it; there is loss

if it is not utilized.”⁸ Moreover, at the federal level President Wilson’s administration fully supported an aggressive approach, calling for farmers “to raise such big crops that circumstances like the present [food shortages in Europe] can never occur.”⁹ Editors in the Whitman County seat at Colfax, Washington, agreed. They wrote in 1918 that, in order to satisfy European demand, “seventy-five million bushels, on the first day of this year, was needed to tide them over until July 1.”¹⁰ The Washington State Grange weighed in as well, passing a resolution in 1920 opposing a bill in the state legislature that proposed to establish a ten-foot easement along streams in agricultural areas. The easements were intended to improve hunting habitat, but the Grange said that the taking of thousands of acres of fertile land was unacceptable.¹¹ Warnings about overproduction and jeremiads on greed filtered through regional conversations, but the loudest and strongest voices came from those who supported maximized production.

In this climate of increased prices and production, farmers realized they now wielded some economic leverage. For the first time, many sought to delay marketing their grain as long as possible in order to take advantage of the worldwide wheat shortage. During the first months of the war, Palouse farmers began “to show no disposition to sell,” and saw “well-defined visions of a magnificent realization of their 1914 input.”¹² Even when wheat reached a dollar per bushel later that year, they delayed selling. The story was repeated each year for the duration of the war. Some of the smaller farmers were obliged to sell shortly after harvest, but medium-to-large operators often stored grain well into the fall and winter months. As farmers learned more about Europe’s misfortunes and about how the international grain futures market worked, they became more financially astute and secure.¹³

Some farmers became rich during the war years. This condition put some in the unfamiliar position of defending their newfound financial status. Farmers stressed that their profits came in the name of supplying Allied forces. A congressman from Washington asked, “Why should not the farmer of this country be prosperous when he is feeding the greatest armies that this world has ever seen?”¹⁴ The farm press reminded its readers that the law of supply and demand determined prices and farm income and dismissed allegations of profiteering. One commentator wrote that supply and demand was “a good law—a real one and a natural one. Man did not make it. No legislature passed it. It was not introduced by initiative, nor amended by referendum. It was right here before we came.”¹⁵ Moreover, farmers were eager to see that prices remained high even after the war. A farmer stated in 1916 that, in the wartime economy, growers “come nearer to receiving what they ought to have. Once they get the right proportion of returns for their products they will never be content to go back to the old ratio. They won’t stand for it.”¹⁶ Farmers reveled in their new economic position and hoped to perpetuate it.



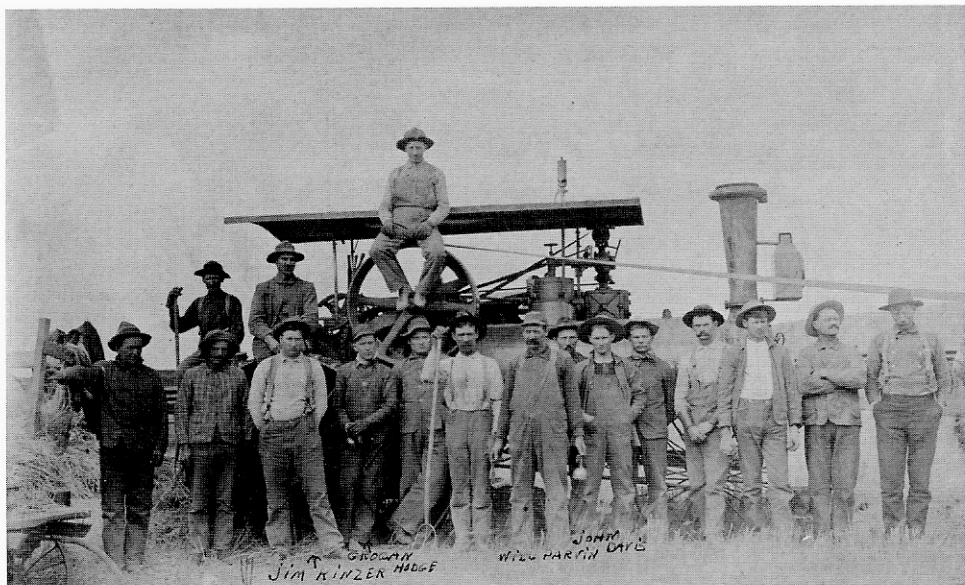
Many farmers contracted with traveling operators for the threshing of their wheat, while some farmers owned their own steam threshers. This crew harvested and threshed the wheat on the Andrews farm near Endicott in 1906. Two workers were perched high atop an unloading derrick. A net was placed in the bottom of the wagons, and this derrick system was used to transfer the unthreshed wheat onto a deck to be fed into the stationary thresher. The lifeline of power for the threshing machine was the long flat belt from the steam engine on the right.

After the war ended and for most of the 1920s, Palouse farmers got their wish. Prices fell considerably after 1920 when Europe managed to revive its dormant agricultural sector, but the decline did not jeopardize the region's wheat farmers. Unlike those in other regions of the nation where there were widespread farm foreclosures, Palouse farmers weathered the downturn relatively well. The local press may have complained of a "ruinous slump" in 1920s wheat prices, yet they remained well above pre-war levels for most of the decade.¹⁷ The per bushel price in Rosalia, Washington, bottomed out at 85 cents in 1923 but remained over \$1 from 1924 through 1929. The inflationary war years meant that farmers costs were also higher, but the result was decreased profits, not bankruptcy.¹⁸

Despite this "surface" prosperity, Palouse farmers faced some hardships in the 1920s. Prices remained high, but operating expenses, especially the cost of machinery, kept many struggling to stay in business. The first decades of the twentieth century saw many American farmers make the leap into mechanized farming. Both steam- and gasoline-powered tractors crawled across Palouse slopes in increasing numbers. Harvesting machines also gained in popularity; combines made wheat harvest a far simpler and less labor-intensive chore. While these machines eliminated some of the drudgery from farming, they also put a premium on high annual production. A farmer with tractor payments could ill afford more than one year of disappointing profits.¹⁹

Although large farm machinery arrived on the Palouse at roughly the same time as other parts of the nation, it failed to create an immediate impact. Manufacturers assumed that their equipment would be used on relatively level ground—such





Harvest crew on Albion-area farm.

as in the Midwest and South—and did not consider how their new devices would work on hilly terrain. The steep hills of the Palouse rendered early tractors useless, especially those with narrow front wheels or with only one front wheel. If the new tractors could not be adapted to the Palouse then neither could the combines attached to them. A mere 256 tractors worked Whitman County fields in 1920 and only 241 in 1925. This contrasted with statewide and national figures that showed tractor numbers nearly doubling in the same period.²⁰ Replacing teams of horses with a John Deere or a Case tractor made little sense if it wound up in a ditch or rolled down a hill.

Heavy equipment sales jumped in the latter half of the 1920s, however. Improved implements (manufacturers began making tractors with a wider wheel-base), better harvests, rising prices, and easy credit made farm mechanization the wave of the future. Although horsepower still performed most of the work in the Palouse in the 1920s, horses were no match for internal combustion in the long run. The number of tractors in Whitman County more than doubled from 1925 to 1930, and they handled nearly half of all field work. The number of combines made a similar gain, as farmers switched from horse-drawn to tractor-drawn implements.²¹ The most striking change occurred in transportation. Motorized trucks replaced horses and wagons at a startling rate—Washington farmers used more than four times as many trucks in 1930 as in 1920, and Idaho farmers used more than six times as many over the same period.²² Prices may have dipped in the 1920s, but not

deeply enough or long enough to prevent Palouse farmers from buying new equipment. In addition, they may have opted for tractors and trucks in an attempt to maximize output to stay in business.

High commodity prices and farm capitalization led to an attending rise in Palouse farmland prices. Typical Palouse land sold for \$35 to \$50 an acre in 1900 and increased to \$75 to \$100 per acre just before the war, reflecting the steady progression of the wheat business. During and after the war, land prices shot up even more. An acre of Palouse land fetched upwards of \$200 an acre by 1923, indicating the region's prosperity and commitment to intensive agriculture.²³ But the prolonged boom carried unwanted consequences as well. Higher land values meant higher property taxes, which added to farm overhead and exacerbated the need to maximize production. Farmers certainly could have sold their land in the 1920s and reaped a handsome reward (as many did), but at the expense of a cherished way of life.

Mechanization and high land prices led to consolidation of ownership. Economies of scale dictated that farmers best utilized expensive machinery by working it as much as possible. They derived more value from a new tractor plowing a 500-acre field than one plowing a 200-acre field. Likewise, grain trucks and combines only made sense if they were used often. Small operators could not use machinery for long enough periods to justify the cost. Nor could they afford such luxuries, since their limited cash flow prevented most from making the necessary loan payments. But larger operators could more easily budget for big-ticket items and pay them off—provided the weather and prices held up.

Therefore, once a farmer bought new equipment, it made sense to buy more land. The increase in the number of tractors directly related to increased farm acreage: Palouse farms averaged 403 acres in 1910, 448 in 1920, 458 in 1925, and swelled to 523 by 1930. One in ten Palouse farms topped 1,000 acres. During the same period, the number of farms went down, as some farmers either went bankrupt or chose to sell their land at inflated prices.²⁴ The early stages of a technological revolution changed more than just how farmers planted and harvested wheat—it also changed the financial and social structure of the Palouse.

Among the several unfortunate by-products of mechanization was an alarming rise in farm debt. Paying cash for land or equipment was not unknown but exceedingly rare; for most wheat growers, new capital required a bank loan. As a result, when buying a new tractor or acquiring a neighbor's homestead, farmers incurred a commensurate amount of debt. Washington farmers owed banks more than \$25 million in 1910, a number that ballooned to \$61 million only ten years later.²⁵ A discernible and troubling pattern of borrowing and expanding swept over the Palouse in the 1910s and 1920s. Farmers initially felt the urge to plant more acres to exploit the high prices of an overheated market. But once they committed to this



Jacobs Farm, Uniontown

A pull combine, a combination of reaper and threshing machine - the header puncher controls the header height with a crank, and the other standing man levels the combine with another crank.

plan through capitalization, they were forced to ride an endless treadmill of debt and maximized production.²⁶ In the words of one farmer, “the Palouse farmer raises more wheat to get more money to buy more land to raise more wheat to get more money to buy more land.”²⁷

Decisions on production, mechanization, and land purchases made in the late 1910s and 1920s have affected the nature and pace of Palouse farming to this day. The urge to make the final break with the past and abandon mixed agriculture came in the late 1910s, never to be revisited again. From that point forward, the overwhelming majority of farmers cast their lot with those who made Palouse farming more capitalized and productive. Farmers often liked to think of themselves as immune from the forces of modernity, but they could not ignore immediate financial rewards or the economic realities of agriculture in the twentieth century.

- ¹ “Uncle John and the War,” *Washington Farmer*, 1 November 1914, 1.
- ² “Annual Average Wheat Prices, 1910-1989,” Rosalia Producers Warehouse.
- ³ “Wheat Prices Soar; Farmers Jubilant,” *Pullman Herald*, 31 July 1914, 1; “Dollar Wheat,” *Pullman Herald*, 31 July 1914, 4; “Grain Quotations Again on Upgrade,” *Pullman Herald*, 5 February 1915, 1.
- ⁴ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Agriculture*, vol. VI, pt. 3 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1922), 144; State College of Washington, Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 300, “Trends in Agriculture in Washington, 1900-1930: Types of Farming Series, Part II,” (n.d.), table 8; “World Faces a Shortage in Wheat,” *Washington Farmer*, 26 October 1916, 1.
- ⁵ “Calamity or Blessing?” *Washington Farmer*, 4 January 1917, 4.
- ⁶ *Washington Farmer*, 15 August 1914, 4. These “marketing methods” probably refer to discriminatory rail freight rates.
- ⁷ *Washington Farmer*, 15 February 1915, 4.
- ⁸ “Use All the Land,” *Washington Farmer*, 4 January 1917, 6.
- ⁹ “Calamity or Blessing?” *Washington Farmer*, 4 January 1917, 4.
- ¹⁰ “We Must Save Wheat,” *Colfax Gazette*, 12 April 1918, 5.
- ¹¹ “Proceedings of the 32nd Annual Session of the Washington State Grange,” (Aberdeen, Washington: Washington State Grange, 1920).
- ¹² “Fortyfold Wheat at Eighty Cents,” *Pullman Herald*, 28 August 1914, 1; “Holding Wheat,” *Pullman Herald*, 4 September 1914, 1.
- ¹³ “Heavy Yields Are Reported Daily,” *Pullman Herald*, 25 August 1915, 1; “Farmers Sell in Wheat Flurry,” *Colfax Gazette*, 10 December 1915, 3; “County Warehouses Bulge with Grain,” *Colton News-Letter*, 7 January 1916, 8; “Northwest Wheat Raisers and the Grain Trust,” *Colton News-Letter*, 3 March 1916, 8-9; “Learn More of Farm Markets,” *Colfax Gazette*, 4 January 1918, 5.
- ¹⁴ “Farmers Get War Orders,” *Colfax Gazette*, 14 April 1916, 5.
- ¹⁵ *Washington Farmer*, 1 September 1914, 4.
- ¹⁶ “Possible Results of High Prices,” *Washington Farmer*, 21 December 1916, 6.
- ¹⁷ “Must Combat Ruinous Slump in Wheat Prices,” *Washington Farmer*, 2 December 1920, 1.
- ¹⁸ “Annual Average Wheat Prices, 1910-1989,” Rosalia Producers Warehouse. At least one historian, H. Thomas Johnson, believes the “farm crisis” of the 1920s to be a myth. See *Agricultural Depression in the 1920s: Economic Fact or Statistical Artifact* (New York: Garland Press, 1985).
- ¹⁹ Gilbert C. Fite, *American Farmers: The New Minority* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); Robert D. Williams, *Fordson, Farmall, and Poppin’ Johnny: A History of the Farm Tractor and Its Impact on America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Wayne D. Rasmussen, “The Impact of Technological Change on American Agriculture, 1862-1962,” *Journal of Economic History* 22, no. 4 (1962): 578-591.
- ²⁰ E.F. Landerholm “The Economic Relation of Tractors to Farm Organization in the Grain Farming Areas of Eastern Washington,” State College of Washington, Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin No. 310 (1935), 9; “Buys Truck for Wheat Hauling,” *Colfax Gazette*, 1 September 1916, 1; “Modern Farming Methods in the Palouse Country,” *Colfax Gazette*, 11 March, 1917, 2.
- ²¹ Landerholm, 9; J.G. Klemgard and G.F. Cadisch, “Cost of Wheat Production by Power Methods of Farming, 1919-1929,” State College of Washington, Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin No. 255 (1931), 10.
- ²² “General Report: Statistics by Subject,” *Census of Agriculture, 1954* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1954), 222-223.
- ²³ F.J. Sievers, “What the War Did for the Palouse Country,” *Washington Farmer*, 21 September 1922, 1; J.E. Nessly, “Wheat Will Always Be King in Palouse Country,” *Washington Farmer*, 27 December 1923, 3.
- ²⁴ “Trends in Agriculture in Washington,” tables 2, 4, 5.
- ²⁵ “Statistics for Counties,” *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1942), 539.
- ²⁶ This dynamic is described in a national context in Willard W. Cochrane, *The Development of American Agriculture: A Historical Analysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- ²⁷ Nessly, “Cost of Producing Wheat in Palouse Country,” 1.

PULLMAN'S OLD POST OFFICE

By Linda Yeomans

The old Pullman Post Office is a well-preserved example of a small-town, single-purpose post office designed with Neoclassical influence. Begun in 1930 and completed in 1931, the building represents a stage in the evolution of federal design from the Beaux Arts tradition of the early 1900s to the modern Neoclassical style, which was used for federal buildings just before and during the early years of the Great Depression. With its monumental pedimented entry portico, the Post Office reflects the formality and sophistication of the United States government. It was praised in a *Pullman Herald* article of April 3, 1931, as “one of the finest federal buildings in Eastern Washington.” It was the first federally constructed and federally owned post office built in Pullman and provided a link between the town’s citizens and the federal government in Washington D. C. A legacy of President Herbert Hoover’s accelerated construction programs established during the beginning of the Depression, the building symbolizes federal aid and a federal presence in Pullman during a time of great economic upheaval.

Post office development in Pullman began as early as 1881. In fact, Pullman did not have an official name until the community applied for its first federal postal services and was required to submit a legal name. In the early years of Pullman post office history, a postmaster was an administrative appointment and his tenure corresponded to the terms of the American presidents. From 1881 to 1929, Pullman’s post offices were sited in nine different locations, including temporary space in homes, businesses, banks, and other facilities that accommodated room for office materials, a safe, and post office boxes. The little town of Pullman grew, especially with increased enrollment every year at Washington State College, and the town’s temporary postal service facilities soon proved to be wholly inadequate. By 1930, Pullman’s population reached 3,300, and Pullman’s first federally owned, single-purpose post office was approved for construction.

On the eve of the Great Depression, the United States Treasury Department purchased land on Paradise Street in Pullman at a cost of \$18,500 as reported in the *Pullman Herald*, April 3, 1931. To lower the cost of construction, it was decided that all planned terra cotta embellishment on the building’s exterior and marble in the building’s interior would be replaced with wood substitutes. Pullman citizenry were sadly disappointed with this decision and sought help from their congressmen. A *Pullman Herald* article dated February 28, 1930, reported that the

townspeople felt “the changes ... would impair the beauty and permanence of the structure.” Fortunately for Pullman, a reversal was realized. The congressmen were successful in their quest for additional funds, and an extra \$7,000 was appropriated for the post office project. The use of terra cotta and marble was reinstated as per the original post office plans.

United States federal supervising architect James A. Wetmore and federal construction engineer John B. Lammers oversaw the project. The Minneapolis-based Fred R. Comb Company was awarded the construction contract for \$82,000. The company was given 360 calendar days to complete the project and was “required to post a bond in the sum of \$41,000, or one-half the contract figure, to guarantee faithful performance” (*Pullman Herald*, April 11, 1930). Pullman photographer Ralph R. Hutchinson took black and white photographs, which provided a step-by-step pictorial documentation of the construction of the Pullman Post Office. Newspaper articles appeared often on the front page of the *Pullman Herald* throughout the building’s construction, and various ceremonies were held to commemorate the new building. Eight months before construction was completed, a *Pullman Herald* newspaper article dated September 5, 1930, reported that “simple but impressive Masonic ceremonies, conducted in the presence of several hundred spectators, marked the laying of the corner stone of Pullman’s new \$107,000 federal building...”



Photo Courtesy of WSU - MASC

October 1, 1930



Photos Courtesy of WSU- MASC

Workroom

February 2, 1931

Lobby

To document the building's construction, a copper box time capsule was sealed and placed in the corner stone. The box contained memorabilia and commemorative items, including post office history, photographs, calling cards from 125 Pullman businesses, records from Washington State College, information from local service clubs and churches, and a copy of the *Pullman Herald*.

Construction of the Pullman Post Office was completed on April 1, 1931. The *Pullman Herald* featured a front-page article on April 3rd with a photograph of the new building. The headlines and photo caption read:

PULLMAN'S NEW FEDERAL BUILDING

This magnificent post office building, costing \$107,000 was opened to the public Monday morning. Conveniently appointed and elegantly furnished, it is one of the finest federal buildings in Eastern Washington.

The article applauded the building's fine exterior and interior features and reported that the "furniture for the new building" was of "the most modern type" and "cost approximately \$15,000." The article described every detail of the building:

The entrance to the new building is on Paradise Street, and is of the colonial pattern with pillars on each side of the doorway. A short flight of steps leads to the main lobby, which is finished in marble, the base being Gravena marble from Alaska, the wainscoting of Alaska Tokenen marble, and the treads of the stairs and other marble [of] Vermont Metawee.

On the right in the lobby are the 500 private boxes which serve Pullman patrons, while on the left are the parcel post, registry, stamp, C.O.D. and postal savings windows. Two desks for the use of customers occupy the lobby together with a bulletin board.

Postmaster Allen's office is at the right from the lobby and includes a vault...The first door at the right of the lobby

leads to the lower floor of the building where a room is provided for the examination of candidates for civil service positions, a feature which will remedy former haphazard and inconvenient accommodations for this work. Locker rooms for the postal employees, a room for postal inspectors, and the furnace and fuel storage rooms are also located in the lower floor in addition to lavatories for both men and women. All light fixtures and hardware in the building are of solid bronze while woodwork is red birch in a mahogany finish. The most modern plumbing fixtures have been installed throughout [the building]. All portions of the building have been carefully equipped with safeguards against mail robbers. All windows are strongly barred and locked and the departments handling sums of money are especially protected by heavy steel caging in addition to the window guards. To facilitate observation of mail riflers, look-outs are arranged on two sides of the building from which inspectors can observe the actions of all within, without being seen themselves.

The Pullman Post Office was enthusiastically welcomed and embraced by the citizens of Pullman. The central location proved to be convenient for downtown businesses and city patrons alike. The building served as the designated site for federal services, information, and activities, and as an informal community meeting place. The building, one of the finest in Pullman, was a source of pride and was the venue for many photographs. In December 1955, Pullman photographer Ralph Hutchinson photographed two Egyptian camels on the front steps of the Post Office for the Pullman Kiwanis, a local service club that sponsored the Passion Play in which the camels had a part. In the 1960s, the basement of the post office was designated a public fall-out shelter for use in times of emergency.

After 45 years of service, the Pullman Post Office outgrew its facilities. By 1970, Pullman's population exceeded 20,000, which was nearly seven times more than the reported 3,300 people living in the town when the post office building was erected in 1930. In 1976, a new post office was built more than a mile south of the central business district, a location considered by some to be too inconvenient and far away from

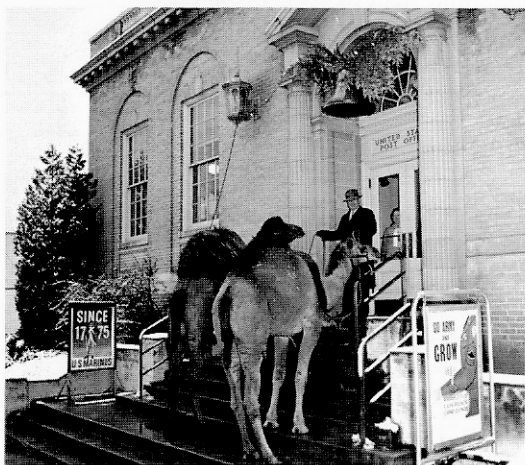


Photo Courtesy of WSU - MASC

downtown businesses. With their hopes dashed that the Old Post Office would remain a postal service center in the town's central business district, the townspeople watched as the building was declared surplus property by the federal government and was sold for \$53,000 to the City of Pullman on April 4, 1977.

In 1978 the City of Pullman leased the property to Pullman entrepreneur Jackson D. Clark. He made some minor changes to the large post office workroom and opened the building for use as a movie theater, called the Old Post Office Theater. Clark later purchased the post office property on February 1, 1982 for \$80,000 from the City of Pullman. At different times since the early 1980s, the main-floor office space in the northeast corner of the building housed a variety of businesses, including shops specializing in the sale of yogurt, videos, firearms, and the Sage Bakery Company. In 1989, after a new entrance to the basement was constructed for direct access, Triticum Press leased the entire basement of the building for their business. On December 22, 2002, J. Thomas Handy, Jr. bought the Old Post Office. The basement of the building now houses "The Wine Cellar," a wine, cheese, and beer retail shop. Handy has tastefully renovated the old mail sorting room on the main floor and turned it into "The Wine Gallery," a wine bar. A Mediterranean-style restaurant, Bella Dolce, also occupies part of the main floor.



April 1, 1931

MEMORIES OF WARTIME PULLMAN

By Lenna Harding

I imagine most Americans begin their account of the war years with Pearl Harbor. My memories go back a bit further into the later 30's with listening to the news on the radio and seeing movie newsreels about the Japanese invasion of China and the atrocities committed there and the Nazi Anschluss in Germany. My father, a history professor whose father was originally from Germany, took Hitler's *Mein Kampf* very seriously while so many others were dismissing it as bragging. Daddy believed Hitler was very dangerous, much more than just a jack-booted puppet with slicked down hair and a silly looking mustache. I remember in those prewar years asking Daddy if we were at war yet.

I know he saw it coming, so when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, it was a shock but we didn't find it much of a surprise. Like so many others, we first heard the newscaster break into the New York Philharmonic radio concert, then heard President Roosevelt announce that a state of war existed with Japan calling it a "day that will live in infamy." Within days we were at war with Germany and Italy, too.

While there had been some military buildup of both men and weapons, the invasion caught the U.S. largely unprepared for immediate all-out involvement. We became a nation of people on the move. This often meant families living in scarce, crowded, substandard housing around some of the larger plants. Women went to work in all manner of jobs previously thought of as being for men only. In fact, women were even better at some tasks, such as working in tight places like inside plane wings and work requiring a delicate touch. They even hired midgets to do riveting and welding in plane wings too. Songs like "Rosie the Riveter" became popular, and the newsreels played up these changes.

Soon all men under age 45 had to register for the draft. Daddy was 44 then. The main topic of conversation was one's draft status. One-A meant a man was almost automatically called up. The various classifications had to do with marital status, number of dependents, one's occupation—those doing essential war work were often exempted—the lowest being 4-F, which meant they didn't want you, usually for health or mental reasons. Some students were exempted until they finished classes. When Daddy was asked his status, his answer was 3-B. This would engender some puzzled expressions since there was no such status. He'd respond, "Oh yes, bald, bilious and bulgy." We all breathed a sigh of relief when he turned 45



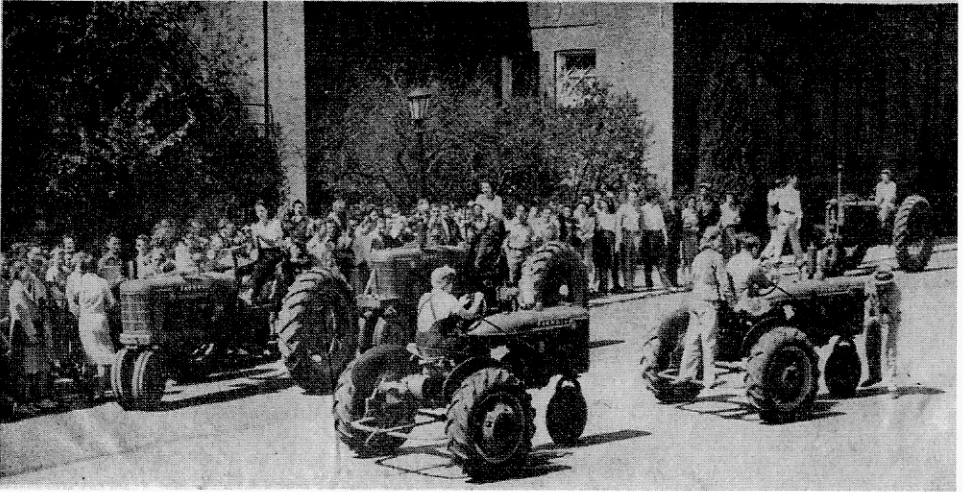
Pullman's pioneering "tractorette" school in which 17 Pullman girls were learning to run and maintain tractors. Evenings the girls studied the tractor at Helbling Bros. tractor headquarters under the direction of Joe Hereford and Floyd Koberstein.

without being called up. Our local draft board was made up of Whitman county citizens who were in charge of the local registration and were given quotas to fulfill. Some men with specialized skills were called up, such as doctors, dentists, professors of subjects needed for troop training. Our neighbor and friend, Russell Vatnsdal, a math professor, was drafted and spent his enlistment in Texas teaching math to Air Corps pilots and navigators.

The newspapers were full of announcements affecting life on the "homefront," as it was called. I can't remember the order things came in or the exact year they started but we were all quickly involved.

Fearing a Japanese attack on our mainland, blackouts were instituted on the coast and even in Pullman. We rigged blackout curtains to avoid showing light at our windows, which could provide guidance to enemy planes. For every neighborhood an air raid warden was appointed whose job it was to patrol his assigned area during a practice blackout to make sure we all complied and had no slivers of light showing.

"Tractorette" School Girls Do Their Stuff Before Movie Cameras



On April 21, 1942, cameramen for Paramount, Pathe, and MGM came from Seattle to record pictorially the "tractorettes." The cameras followed a procession through the WSC campus, as students, late for their 1:30 classes, provided a human background. The results were shown in newsreels across the nation.

A siren was installed on the roof of city hall and was tested periodically, followed by an "all clear" signal.

The nearest we ever came to being bombed were the balloon bombs that Japan sent our way. At first the government debated whether to tell people about them for fear of causing panic, but when at least one kid got killed in Oregon playing with one, it was decided to let the word out with warnings to leave them alone and report them. I gather a few blew as far to the east as Montana, but that one in Oregon was the only one that caused any injury. The Japanese soon gave them up as fruitless.

I guess a few submarines were spotted off the coast. Volunteer coast watchers kept watch as well as Forest Service lookouts. Newsreels and posters showed us how to deal with an unexploded bomb or live ammunition shells. I vaguely remember being told to carefully rake it into a bucket of sand or some such procedure. I don't think such actions would be recommended today—we'd call the nearest bomb squad.

Shortages of materials essential to feeding, clothing, and equipping the rapidly expanded military soon developed, especially those items made of copper, rubber, certain precious metals, coffee and sugar, much of which came from overseas. Where practical, alternate materials soon came into use to replace essential metals. One I remember was the change in Washington state sales tax tokens, which went from some aluminum-like metal to green plastic and, later, to some kind of pressed

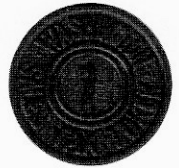
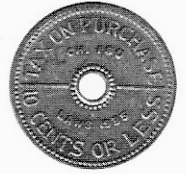
cardboard. Worth three to a penny they stayed in use until the tax was raised from one percent to three percent. Rationing began to allot essential items fairly for civilian use while still providing for the war machine.

Everyone had to apply for ration books from a ration board made up of local volunteers. Each book contained tear-out coupons worth so many “points” each. Different colors were for different classes of items. “Change” took the form of blue or red tokens made of some kind of pressed paper or fiber, each worth one point. Food items included canned goods, meat, fats, and sugar. During these years commercially frozen foods came on the market to replace the need for cans (although farmers had been freezing their food for years) and so frozen foods, too, were rationed. Since grocers had only old-fashioned ice cream freezers designed to hold round cans of ice cream, these were adapted to hold frozen vegetables and fruit. Mama carefully opened the waxed paper wrappings and cartons to save for home freezing.

Almost all meat was rationed, with more desirable cuts costing more points. Mutton wasn’t rationed, however, and the college meat cutting classes used mature sheep as demonstration and practice animals. The meat was then sold to our butcher, Mr. Simon, at Maxwell Meats and he, in turn, retailed it to his customers. Our family was one of the few of his customers who really liked mutton, so when we could get it we ate very well. A big leg gave the three of us a week of very good eating. This meant we had saved points for better cuts of other meat afterward. At that time, those folks who had the money ate more meat than is now considered heart healthy, so we really didn’t suffer. The biggest change was in our eating habits, not the quantity of food. Dessert recipes were printed in newspapers and magazines for Karo cakes and frostings and other substitute goodies to satisfy our sweet teeth. We were allowed extra sugar for canning during canning season.

Since dogs did not have ration books, we switched our dog from canned food to a new dry mealy food that came on the market. Unlike anything available today all nicely pelletized in kibbles, this granulated stuff had to be cooked. This became Daddy’s chore. Since it smelled ghastly, Mama and I requested he prepare it, if possible, when we weren’t around. He would add whatever leftover cooked veggies were in the fridge to gussy it up—it became quite a canine gourmet concoction. He’d cook enough for a week at a time, and it took up more than its share of limited refrigerator space—a lot more than a partially used open can. This was Daddy’s only cooking skill, and I’m still surprised he didn’t burn it. Fortunately, Topsy liked it.

To be continued.





Crabtree Warehouse, NW of Garfield, circa 1907. Spokane & Inland Empire Railroad



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