

# Bunchgrass Historian



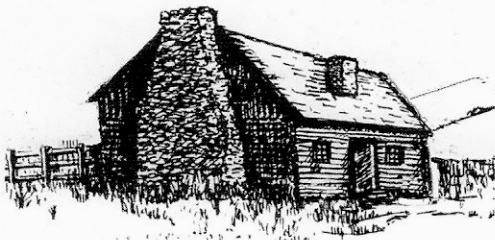
Whitman County Historical Society  
Colfax, Washington

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**30 Days in a Cookhouse**  
**The Stillwater Engine**  
**Live Theater on the Palouse**  
**Squally John**  
**Memories of Life on a Farm**

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# Whitman County Historical Society Colfax, Washington

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

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## COVER

*A harvest cookhouse wagon with the cooks who did all the hard work; Steptoe Butte in the background.*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

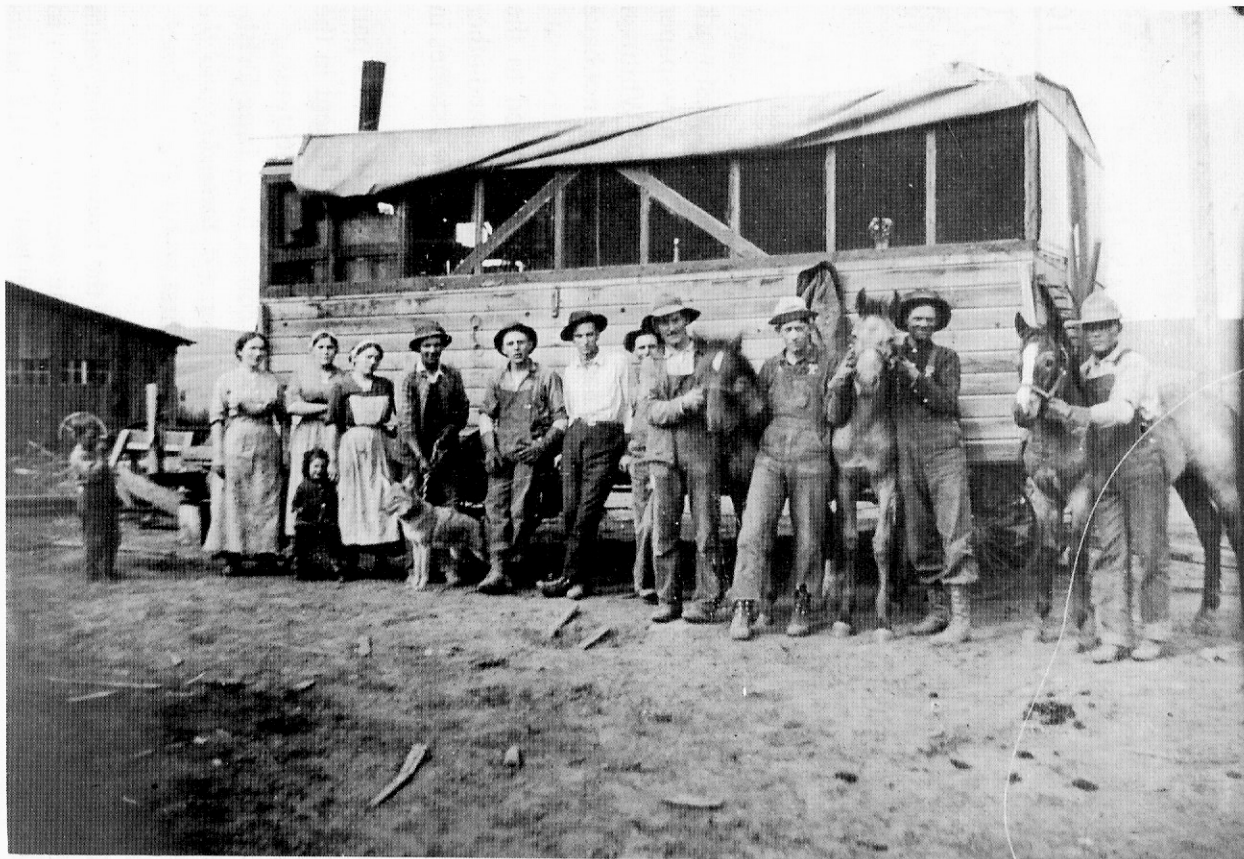
**Lucille G. Howard** wrote this account of her summer harvest work in a cookhouse wagon in 1919. It was published in a Spokane newspaper in the 1960s and became part of a clipping collection given to the Whitman County Historical Society archive. Like so many such items, it did not have either the source or date saved with the article.

Long time WCHS member, **Gerald Henson** has donated to the WCHS archive much of his photograph collection, recollections, and other records of local history. He has written two previously published stories in the *Bunchgrass Historian*.

**Richard Domey** shared this piece with us – a work that was part of his research for his dissertation for the WSU theater department in the 1970s. The sources he refers to can be found in our archive collections.

This retelling of the story of Squally John comes from **June Crithfield**'s book about Wawawai and the Snake River: *Of Yesterday and the River* (1964 –latest edition 2003). June was the first editor of our *Bunchgrass Historian*.

**Lee S. Wilson** and his wife visited some of the haunts of his youth in the summer of 1974. The dramatic changes to the area inspired him to record his memories of his childhood at Riparia from 1907 to 1917. In his 1987 letter of donation to the WCHS archive, he expressed the hope that excerpts from his 42 page typescript might someday be published.



*The Pierson cookhouse with harvest crew and cookhouse workers*

## 30 DAYS IN A COOKHOUSE

By Lucille G. Howard

When my father in 1919 “hired” my older sister, Ellen, to cook during harvest—on our heavily mortgaged, entirely unsubsidized wheat ranch in Eastern Washington — somewhere along the way, I became a member of the crew. My job was to assist the cook. I was 12 or 13 at the time, and useful only as a dish washer and general handy annie. It sounded like fun, a new kind of adventure in my small, drab world.

The cookhouse was the forerunner of the modern house trailer. Built on a wagon bed to fit our needs, it was adequate but far from fancy. There were no “sanitary facilities”—in fact, the only running water seeped from a pan onto the burlap-covered sides of the primitive refrigerator built on the back, just outside the door.

Inside there was a bench along one side and a white oilcloth-covered table, long enough to seat eight harvest hands. A kerosene stove with portable oven and storage cupboards with counter tops for working space completed the furnishings.

The sides were screened to catch any passing breeze, and there were canvas shutters outside which could be closed in case of a dust storm. It could be moved from one field to another as harvest progressed.

As the fields of grain turned from green to a golden yellow, we stocked the cookhouse with necessary dishes, utensils and groceries. The big day arrived, dad hitched the horses to the cookwagon, and we started off on the long ride to the far field (almost five miles away). I was the envy of my younger brothers and sisters who had to stay at home.

Old Joe and Babe, Gyp and Judy, were steady, reliable horses, and the trip over deep-rutted roads was made without difficulty. No green grass, trees, or cool stream of water greeted us upon arrival at our campsite. Instead, the hot August sun beat down unmercifully on the desolate spot, where soon the traffic of men, mules, and wheels would carpet the ground with six inches of fine, loose soil. Nearby stood a tank of water for use of men and mules.

A large stack of hay, which furnished dormitory quarters for the men, stood at some distance from the cook house. And, at the edge of the field, its metal teeth gleaming in the sun, stood a bright new piece of machinery, the combine, waiting to bite off, consume, and then spit out the golden grains of wheat. Thirty or more thirsty mules gathered about the large galvanized water trough. For this was in pre-tractor days for us, and mules were a very necessary part of the farming operation.

Pieces of canvas provided privacy for the cots placed beneath the cook wagon, and we went to bed as soon as it was dark that first night. “We’ll have to roll out about four every morning, Lucy,” Ellen, my sister, said. “So we’ll have time to make biscuits or pancakes. You have to give harvesters plenty of good food, or they’ll quit in the middle of the job.”

So roll out we did, but after the first morning, I’m afraid I had an extra catnap while my sister got the breakfast started. The novelty had begun to wear off, and it didn’t seem quite so much fun.

Day after hot summer day we worked: with one purpose in mind, to prepare enough food to appease the ravenous appetites of a crew of men, and it became a monotonous, unexciting chore. No instant food or mixes eased our task. Breakfast consisted of sausage or ham, fried potatoes, eggs, fruit, hot cakes or biscuits, and pots and pots of strong black coffee. Other meals were equally dainty.

Each morning Dad, the camp roustabout, drove back to the ranch in his old Maxwell touring car, returning with fresh milk, cream, eggs, home-baked bread, freshly churned butter, and occasionally two or three young chickens from the flock. Dad’s chores also included keeping the water tank filled, trips to town for fresh meat and vegetables, “snooze” for Albert, our year-around hired man, and other necessities.

The only thing “instant” about any of the food in those days was the time it took our crew to wolf it down. We’d spend hours in our makeshift kitchen cooking, baking, and preparing meals and were always amazed how quickly they vanished.



*Cookhouse with work crew and horse team*

Unpredictable things happened to break the monotony, however. Like the day I sat in the cream pie just before dinner. On another time just after we'd announced breakfast, I dropped a large platter of juicy, thick-sliced ham. Breaking most of a stack of soup plates wasn't such a tragedy, for it was getting too hot for soup anyway.

The men in the crew were earning their wages, too. Every morning they were up at dawn, feeding, watering, and harnessing the mules which pulled the big combine as it cut swath after swath around the fields. Rested after a good night's sleep, their cheerful banter could be heard in the mornings, calling to one another or having a man-to-mule talk.

Evenings, after a long, arduous day under the blazing sun, they returned to camp tired, wet with sweat, and covered with fine, silt-like dust. They made a crudely constructed shower which helped in making life bearable during the hot dusty weeks of harvest.

The uncut field of wheat grew smaller and smaller each day until one morning Dad said: "Tomorrow's our last day; why don't you girls take that ride on the combine you've been talking about?"

This was the special day we had all been waiting for. With the end of harvest, the men would head for town with money in their pockets to celebrate after a long, dry summer. We girls longed for home, with its trees and shade where we could wash away the last traces of dust from the long harvest and once again feel the smooth cool sheets of our own beds.

"I want to ride with the driver," I said. He sat suspended high in the air, above the backs of the mules, dangling on the end of the long, unsteady arm.

"You can't ride up there with the mule skinner, you'd scare the mules," Dad said. As it turned out, it wasn't my fault the mules were scared that afternoon. The large hitch which fastened mules to combine unexpectedly broke, just as we were going up a small, but steep hill. In a few seconds, everything was confusion. The combine lurched backwards and almost turned over.

Old Mac, the machinist, quickly set the brakes and told us to stay where we were. We looked over the side of the combine, and through the thick cloud of dust, saw 30 very frightened mules. Some were down on their backs, their legs thrashing wildly through the air; they kicked, bolted, tried to free themselves of the tangled web of harness. It was a grotesque nightmare of dust, wild-eyed mules, and courageous men who established order at last.

Some of the younger mules had succeeded in getting loose, but only Charley, the problem child in the mule team, got away. Charley was leisurely enjoying a drink of water from the trough when we returned to camp.

No more cutting was done that day, and we decided it was bad luck for cooks to ride on the combine. Cooks belonged inside a cook house, where there was always plenty to do during the long, busy days of a wheat harvest.

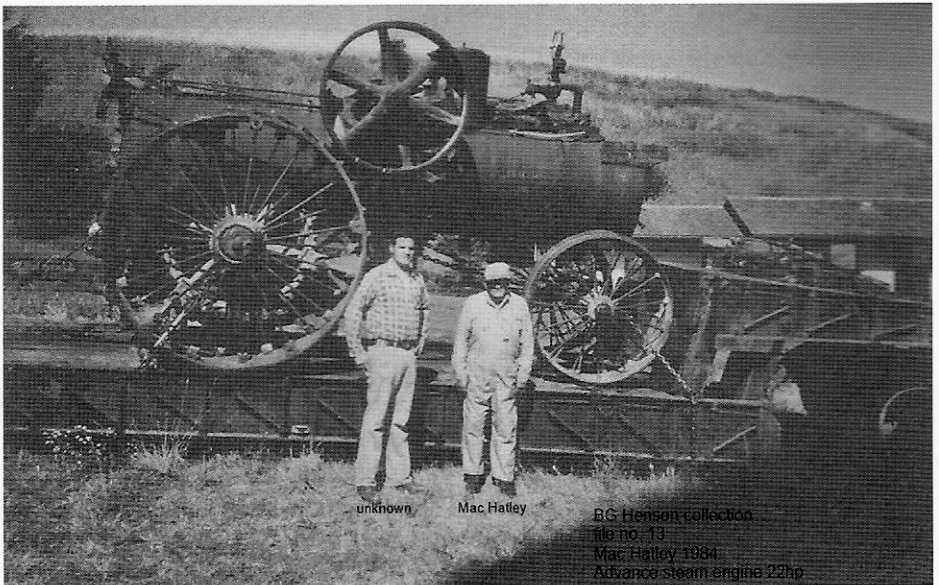
# MEMORIES: Mac Hatley Remembers the Stillwater Engine

## By Gerald Henson

Several years ago, I was visiting my neighbor, Mac Hatley, who, as he put it, was a tired and retired farmer. Mac has long since passed away but I always enjoyed visiting with him as a kid and adult. He always had an opinion on something or a good story, sometimes both.

In his barn lot he had an old steam engine. I can remember a big truck delivering it years before. I asked if it had belonged in his family. He replied he had rescued it from a saw mill on Moscow Mountain and brought it home. It was a 22 hp Advance Straw Burner. It was mostly complete; however, there were some small parts missing and all the gears and pulleys were rusted up. It would take a lot of time, work, and money to get it running again. Mac said he got this engine just to remind him of the one his father had many years ago. I questioned him about the earlier steam engine. He told me this following story.

The year was 1887, Whitman County, Washington Territory. Mac's father, Riley B. Hatley, traveled to Stillwater, Minnesota, by the Northern Pacific railroad and stage coach. There he purchased a Stillwater steam engine. The engines were made under the Northwest Thresher Company. The engines



*Mac Hatley and 22 hp Advance on truck*



and other farm equipment were made in the state penitentiary by the inmates (cheap labor). The engine was 10 hp and was self-propelled by chain drive from the flywheel to the right rear ground wheel. It was also equipped with a seat for the driver and a tongue so it could be pulled by a team of horses. The engine was shipped down the Mississippi River by riverboat to New Orleans. It was then transferred to a ship. From there it sailed around the tip of South America and up the West Coast to the Columbia River, and on up to Portland,



Stillwater Steam Engine  
Northwest Thresher Company

Oregon. It was again transferred to a riverboat, a steam powered paddle wheeler, and made the trip up the Columbia River to what is now Pasco, Washington, where the Columbia and the Snake Rivers come together. Mr. Hatley and his steam engine spent a couple days in Pasco and then boarded another steamboat for the trip up the Snake River. After about a two-week trip, the steamboat pulled into Almota, Washington. Mr. Hatley had traveled with his engine the whole way. The engine was unloaded and R. B. Hatley hitched up a team of horses which he had left there before he left on his trip. With the horses working hard, the Stillwater steam engine was pulled up the Snake River canyons on a wagon road on its way to his farm on Union Flat some 25 miles away. The whole trip took two to three months.

R. B. Hatley not only did his own harvesting with this outfit, but also hired out to his neighbors. I was told that one neighbor paid him in three dollar gold pieces at the end of harvest. Some payments were made this way and at other times they were done on shares. The Stillwater engine was used until about 1904, when it was replaced by a more modern horse-drawn combine. The engine was junked out just before or during World War I. This is the only Stillwater engine that I have heard of in our Palouse country. The most popular steam engines were J. I. Case, Advance, Rumely, Minneapolis and others.

# LIVE THEATER ON THE PALOUSE

## An Historic Tradition

By Richard L. Domey

During the 1880s, 1890s, and into the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century live theater was a vital part of a growing frontier in the Pacific Northwest Inland Empire. Local communities produced theatrical events and traveling companies had a regular route from Salt Lake City with stops at Boise, Idaho; Baker City, Oregon; Walla Walla, Washington, and then the Palouse on the way to Spokane and then Seattle. These stops were one day's train travel apart, which made perfect timing between performances.

One of the main stops was in the town of Palouse with its estimated population in 1893 of between 1,800 to 2,000 people. It had a good performance venue at the Palouse Opera House or, as it was known during the 1880s and 90s, "Power's Opera House." It was W. L. Powers, Palouse business man and entrepreneur, who built the Opera House in 1889. Powers had a number of different business ties in the community including land and farming, but a major contribution was the building and renting of this performance venue.

We can easily follow the history of this cultural center in the Palouse country by looking at late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century newspapers and journals. The two main sources of information are the *Palouse Republic* and the *Palouse City News*. Both newspapers appeared in what they advertised as the "fastest growing city in the Inland Empire." In addition, a few copies of an 1882 newspaper called *The Boomerang* are still available on microfilm in the Washington State University library.

When I first did this research in 1975 while looking for material and ideas for my theatre dissertation, two pamphlets published and written by citizens of the area were still available in the Palouse library. They are *The Palouse Story* or "Palouse Town and Country Study Programs, Report of History Committee" (March 1962) by Chairman Robert H. MacPherson and "Palouse . . . in the Making" by Garret D. Kincaird and A. H. Harris (1934).

The *Palouse City News* (April 1892) ran a story on the Opera House describing its facilities, probably for the purpose of advertising the town and its amenities. The 1890s was an era of growth for the Inland Empire and the newspaper carried articles and advertisements every week extolling the virtues of the Palouse area.

The Opera House had a stage that was twenty-two feet wide by fourteen feet high. Existing pictures give an indication that the stage may have been approximately twelve feet deep. The theater had several drop curtains with scenes done by E.H. Orcut, a teacher and sometimes newspaper man who also owned for



*Powers Opera House, later known as the Congress Theater*

a time the *Palouse City News*. He was the organizer and director/actor of many of the community theater productions on stage during the 1890s. Some years the community group put on three or four plays per season. That was before television captured audience attention.

*The Palouse Story* pamphlet mentions some of the titles that traveling troupes active in Eastern Washington produced at the Opera House. *Ten Nights in a Bar Room* and *The Struggle for Gold* were among them. The Curtis Comedy Troupe in 1908, with eighteen cast members and their own band and orchestra, presented *LaBella Mariez* and *My Uncle From New York* before a good-sized crowd.

Comedy wasn't the only type of entertainment that came to the Palouse Opera House. The Kincaird and Harris pamphlet notes that "out of the Civil War came a number of theatrical presentations, even as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had come out of slavery. Perhaps the most prominent play of the group for two or three decades was the *Spy of Atlanta*. At least once it was presented in the old Power's opera house — before the degenerate days when the house was dubbed a 'hall.'" Concerts and dances also were regular fare at the opera house.

J.B. West of Palouse, who graduated from the Palouse High School in 1915, recalled in a *Palouse Republic* article (April 1975) that the theater was home to road shows, medicine shows, and many school activities. It also served as the town meeting house. West estimated that the seating capacity was around 200. The 1892 news article agreed, citing 160 chairs and enough to bring the seating to over 200 with floor space for approximately 500 persons. The theater was heated and

had electric lights.

Some nationally known figures played at the Opera House. Carrie Nation gave a temperance lecture one night. Victor McLaughlin came to Palouse with a carnival. He was a boxer at the time (later an actor in the early days of film) and still had bruises from a recent bout with then world champion, Jack Johnson. McLaughlin stayed after the carnival left town and gave lessons and exhibitions at the Opera House.

Titles shown in the local newspapers of the time list a number of plays that were produced, none of which are familiar today. The local dramatic club did, for example, *Brac, the Poor House Girl*. The Carolyn Gage Company, there on May 29, 1893, seemed to be a favorite. This group returned many times, stayed for several nights, and presented a different play each night. The paper comments, "The news that their old favorite, Carolyn Gage, is to be in Palouse again next month will give great pleasure to the theater goers of the city. The talented actress is supported by a much stronger company than last season and will appear in three new plays."

The *Palouse Republican* shows a sampling of the events and shows that came to town in the 1890s. In January 1892, for example, Major Anderson Post #29, Grand Army of the Republic, arranged "a dramatic and literary entertainment." The Grey Theatre Company put on *Solomon Isaacs*, and local talent produced *Nevada or the Lost Mine*," although subsequent performances in Colfax and Pullman were cancelled due to "internal dissensions." In September 1892, the



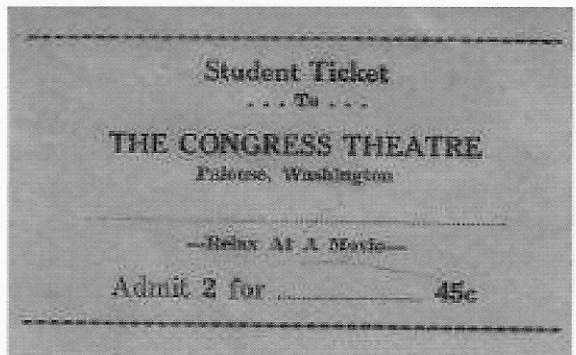
The "Times" by the Class of '11

Hewett Musettes presented “short comedies,” “vocal and instrumental music along with Zetta, the mind reader.” In December 1892, W. H. H. Fonner’s singing class put on a concert, there was a Firemen’s Ball, and E. H. Orcut’s amateur company put on *Wild Mab*, repeated in January of 1893. February of 1893 anticipated a large crowd to welcome “the Colfax Monstrel [sic] and Comedy.” The June presentations included The Big Bonanza Company, a “Masquerade Ball complete with costumes available for rent,” sponsored by the “light Guard Band and Prof. Lawlor,” and “The Celebrated Mormon drama, *Zion*.” In May of 1894, a local group called the Palouse Minstrels performed. A Grand Calico Ball is listed for the Opera House as late as February of 1901.

Gradually, judging from reviews, the character of the entertainment seemed to be changing. On March 17, 1893, the *Palouse News* comments that “Wm. L. Powers, owner of the Palouse Theater, deserves great credit and liberal patronage for guaranteeing the Alba Heywood Company \$150.” He showed “public spirit” by bringing in the play *New Edgewood Folks*, which was advertised in 24 column inches. On March 31 after the production, the paper continues, “Mr. Heywood is a very clever comedian and managed to inject enough leaven into the dough of an uninteresting play, and mediocre company, to produce a palatable loaf of amusement . . . Of his support little good can be said. . . Mr. Heywood is worthy of a better play and stronger support.” Even a growing small town can aspire to better cultural performances.

In the early 1900s, however, outside troupes seemed to be decreasing in number. Local use of the building continued with the high school senior plays, commencement exercises, and winter dances. In 1910 the Senior class produced Sheridan’s *The Rivals*. A picture of this production appears in the 1911 Palouse High School yearbook, along with another play, *The Times*.

One evening in 1975, after I had been in Palouse and had seen the Congress Theater, I visited with Melvina Brannan, nee Asbury, at the Colfax nursing home. Mrs. Brannan and her husband, Cecil, had run a wheat ranch in the area for many years. At the time of my visit, I was married to her granddaughter and visited Mrs. Brannan regularly. She shared her memories of the Palouse Opera House, including her role as maid in a production of *The Times*. She said her younger memories of the Opera House were highlighted by visiting Medicine Men and their variety shows. Every winter a touring medicine show would





### The "Rivals" by the Class of '10

arrive in Palouse and the company gave children free tickets to hand out and handbills to post. As she remembered, very few townswomen went to the nightly performances. Mainly menfolk and young people attended. The shows were mostly music with some magic tricks and sometimes a dancing dog or girl. Melvina said she liked the dogs better. After the show the manager would sell patent medicine among other things. Melvina maintained that the medicine was "really good for lots of things" and still had a wooden box of pink tooth powder that she bought in 1912.

The second floor of the Opera House was a venue for winter dances as well as high school commencements. Mr. J.B. West remembered that the second floor of the building was converted to a rooming house where he lived from 1918 to 1920. During the 1920s and into the 1930s, the building became the Congress Hotel. In the 1940s the downstairs was renovated into a movie theater called the Congress Theater.

The newspapers of the 1890s and into the early 1900s are full of advertisements and stories about the various shows that came to the Palouse. *The Boomerang* (July 27, 1888) had a few suggestions for Wood and Company and its *Traveling Comiques*, obviously based on past experience with show biz people: "Don't play snide with the printer [meaning the local newspaper], be economical and save money enough to buy a suitable scene to take along with you. Don't eat 50 cents worth of grub at a 25 cent restaurant and then kick about paying 25 cents. Try to gain enough popularity so that you can draw an audience . . ."

# SQUALLY JOHN

By June Crithfield

Near Bishop's Bar on the Snake River, there lived among the settler families along the river, an interesting and unusual neighbor. On a bank near a creek that flows to the river, lived Indian Squally John. He had come to the river from the coast many years before any of the white settlers, probably as early as 1848. He took possession of an old cabin once used by fur trappers.

He is thought to have met Dr. McLoughlin at Fort Vancouver when he was a boy. He was ill at the time and after his recovery he adopted the given name of the good doctor. A member of the Nisqually tribe, he had come to the river after an altercation with the medicine man of the tribe. There seem to be two stories as to why he left his tribe. One holds that his wife became ill, and, when the medicine man could not save her, Squally tried to kill him and failed and then was forced to flee. The other story is that in retaliation for his wife's death, Squally stole the medicine man's woman. She escaped, but the medicine man caught up with Squally near Wallula one night. Catching him unaware, the medicine man first broke Squally's leg in the fight and then proceeded to burn out his eye, leaving him for dead on the river bank. The next morning he was dragged from the river by a priest and cared for there for almost a year. When he left there he came to the cabin on the Snake. Which story is the true one is anyone's guess. It is known that Squally had a bad eye which he often kept covered with a patch and which gave him a great deal of trouble in his old age.

He married a woman of the Nez Perce tribe soon after he arrived on the river. Although she and Squally had no children, she brought with her two sons by a first marriage, who were named Jackson and Johnson. The story is told that he aided Steptoe and might possibly have saved the life of one Sgt. Ball. Although evidence of this could not be found, it is entirely possible.

There is evidence to prove his service with General Howard in the battle against Chief Joseph. This document is on file in Washington, D. C.

Squally John claimed he served eighty days as wagon and forage master for General Howard and was promised \$2.50 a day for the service. He was paid \$100 for serving the month of August, 1877, but nothing more. In 1903, the Colton postmaster, Bill Renfro, and Judge John L. Flowers entered a claim for the balance due Squally for his services, but, as happened so many times in

agreements between the military and the Indians, accurate records were not kept and the petition was denied.

He received a patent to 78 acres of land on February 2, 1889, which was signed by President Grover Cleveland.

After orcharding on the river became a way of life, Squally and his wife planted cherry and peach trees. He would ride horseback up the canyon behind his home to Colton, with the fruit slung over the saddle horn in a sack. It did not arrive in exactly Grade A condition.

His wife, whose name is not known, became paralyzed about twelve years before she died. Because of this, they rigged up a pulley affair attached to a small platform on which she could scoot herself from the bedroom to the kitchen. By removing the legs from the kitchen stove, they lowered it enough so she could sit on the floor to cook.

Squally John bucked straw for the Ferguson Bros. during the harvest season. He was a familiar sight around Colton and would always stop to visit along the way until something was said which made him mad. When this happened, he would turn and ride off without another word. Like many of the Indians after the coming of the whites, he was intrigued with matches and would bum them from everyone he met. One day some of the men around town got tired of the outstretched hand the minute they came in sight, so they gave him some matches that had been watered. He never bummed matches after that, but he got even when he pulled the same stunt on C. T. Stranahan, Lapwai Indian agent. Mr. Stranahan had decided the only way to beat the red men at their own game was to hold his hand out first, and, when he did this to Squally, he got the watered matches!

When his wife died, he buried her on a knoll overlooking their home on the river and for years he kept a neat fence around the grave. Vandals have dug there and no trace is found of either the grave or the fence.

The story was told that on a trip back to his tribe, Squally once took his two dogs—the white one, Hiawapo, and the black one, Sweewepo. When he returned by train, he left the dogs on the coast. A week later the dogs both came limping home.

When the railroad demanded a right-of-way through his property, Squally rebelled and fought with the company for many years. Finally convinced by the Colton postmaster that he would have to grant the permission, he made his mark on the paper. But when he found out this meant the railroad would fence in the legal 100-foot right-of-way, he could not understand this. Knowing that many of his



white neighbors had received some of their land through the Soldier's Additional Homestead Rights, in recognition of their services, he would say, "My father in Washington has a record of my services and has given me this land." The railroad siding here is named "Indian" after Squally John.

Although he would never tell his age in years, he would answer all queries with "so many snows ago I did this" or "so many snows ago I was there."

Indian Squally John lived on the river until about 1914 when he was taken to Portland, Oregon, because of an ailment in his legs. He is well remembered by many old-timers and was living on the river when the first white settlers came to the river. According to government records, he was over one hundred years old when he died.



*Squally John was a respected member of the community as evidenced by this 1911 photograph of early Colton, Washington, pioneers.*

# CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF LIFE ON A FARM

By Lee S. Wilson

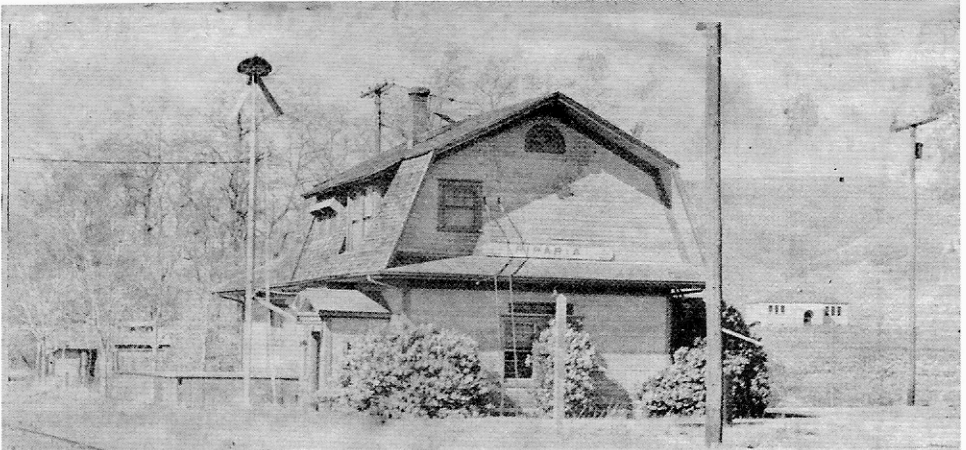
I was a little over a year old when our Wilson family moved to a farm near Riperia, where we lived from 1907 to 1917. A whole host of early memories are clustered about life on our "farm-ranch," located about a mile north of the Snake River between Walla Walla and Spokane on the Oregon-Washington Railroad Navigation Company (O.W.R. & N. Co.). I always think of it as a "farm-ranch" because the farm, a section of land, consisted of about two hundred acres under irrigation. Later more grazing land was added. The balance was copper-green sagebrush and bunch grass grazing land for cattle. This part of the ranch was not irrigated, depending on the infrequent rains to keep grass growing. About forty acres were planted in fruit trees -- cherries, pears, plums, and peaches. The rest of the irrigated land, about one hundred and sixty acres, was planted in alfalfa under irrigation. Carved out of one corner of an alfalfa field near the house was a vegetable garden where tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, asparagus, carrots, beets, onions, peas, and potatoes were grown.

An alfalfa field was in front of the house and extended to a creek about two hundred yards away which became a raging flood some years during the Spring. Beyond the bank on the far side of the stream were the railroad tracks. A dirt road paralleled the railroad. Beyond the road, a fence enclosed the school yard, and exactly in the middle of the square yard -- about a hundred yards on each side -- sat the schoolhouse with a square bell-fry on top in the front. This school was the setting for the first four grades of school for my brother Neil and me.

Our house was a two-story frame affair with an attic for storage. It was surrounded by a wire fence to keep the farm animals away from the grass and my mother's flowers. Outside the fence on one side there was a line of tall poplar trees. These trees were the boundary for the alfalfa field. Behind the house the ground rose to a bench where another alfalfa field continued to a line of Black Walnut trees some two hundred yards away. These trees were planted beside an irrigation ditch which provided the life-giving water for the fruit trees, the alfalfa fields, and the vegetable garden. Immediately beyond the irrigation ditch, bare bunch grass and sage brush



*A view of Riparia showing the settlement, bridge, and steamboats moored on the Snake River*



### **Riparia station, once a strategic rail center, awaits end**

Trains from three different railroads used to report at the Riparia station during the town's hectic early days. The line seen here heads north to LaCrosse and Spokane. The Camas Prairie rails entered Riparia at the right of this picture. The Northern Pacific train from Pasco would pass the

station at about where the picture was taken and then connect with the Camas line upstream for the run on to Lewiston. The first Riparia station was built across the river. The last Riparia school stands in the background.

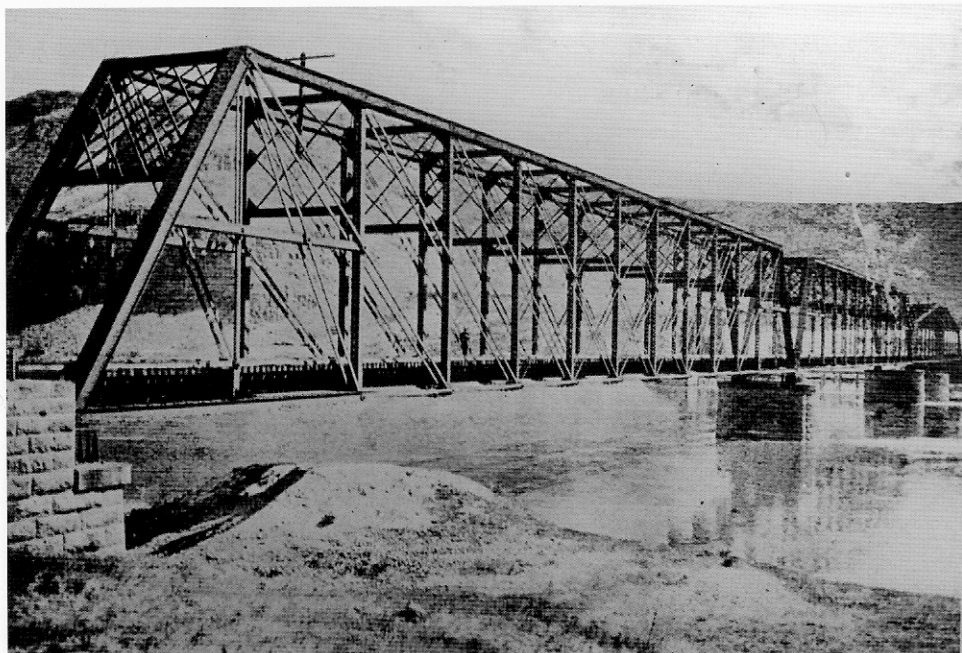
hills began to rise. There were several hundred acres of these bare, rolling hills which provided spring and summer grazing for our cattle.

During the cherry picking season, dad employed students from Washington State College. There must have been a dozen or more. They picked the fruit, packed it in boxes for shipping, and helped get the packed boxes to the railroad depot in Riparia. I can remember their several tents pitched in a corner of the alfalfa field in front of our house. There were both boys and girls; the boys did the picking, and the girls did the packing. The tent for the girls was some distance from the boys' tent but, in the evening, after supper, they would sing songs around a campfire. Their voices blended beautifully, and gradually faded away as the skies darkened and the campfire turned to faint, glowing embers.

At the end of the day, my father would load up the long spring wagon with cherries, later in the season, peaches, and drive the mile into Riparia, the nearest rail shipping point from our ranch. Often Neil and I would go along on these rides which were taken after supper in the waning light of the long summer evenings. After unloading the fruit on the station platform, and signing the necessary shipping papers, we rode back, the horses trotting part of the time.



*The hotel at Riparia with a small Army encampment in front*



*The railroad bridge over the Snake River at Riparia*

I remember feeding the cattle. There were several cuttings of alfalfa; it was raked into windrows, then shocked by hand, and finally pitched on a hayrack. It was then driven to a stack in the field, or the “big” haystack, where it was picked up by a lift-fork, carried to an overhead trolley, run out on the cable, and dropped where the stacker indicated. When snow was on the ground the cattle had to be fed night and morning.

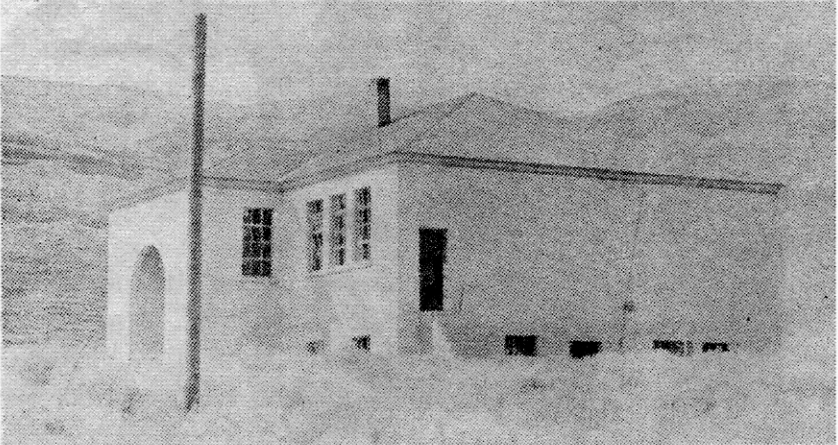
A small hayrack on a sled was driven up beside one of the stacks in the field. With a pitchfork, the loose hay on top of the stack was thrown on the sleigh. But in the middle of the stack, sometimes the hay was frozen and was tightly packed. Then it became necessary to use a hay cutter -- a sharp, scythe-like affair with two handles, one on the end, and the other about half way down the side of the cutter. Once cut, the hay would be thrown on the sleigh in slices, where it would be fluffed out to dry and air. The hay would be driven to the feed trough and pitched inside. The cattle would pull the hay out between the upright bars of the trough.

Blackie was a saddle horse and my favorite. For a time one of my chores was to ride Blackie after the cows which might be any place on several hundred acres of hilly, grazing land. Except for bunch grass and sage brush, the land was bare without trees of any kind. The occasional

rains would keep the grass growing just enough to provide summer grazing. The milk cows were kept in the barn at night and fed alfalfa hay night and morning. But in the daytime they were turned out in the hills to forage for themselves. About an hour before milking time, Blackie and I and our dog “Jing” would start out. Several of the cows had bells, so if we got within range of the bell, we could hear it, even though the cows were out of sight over a hill, or down a draw.

Our farm was about a mile north of the Snake River and Riparia rail junction. Riparia was a delightful place for adventure whenever we could persuade our parents to take us there. Riparia was located where the Oregon-Washington Railroad crossed the Snake River on the route between Walla Walla and Spokane. It had a general store combined with a few rooms and a dining room of sorts. A spur of the railroad ran to Lewiston, Idaho, about ninety miles away, and a second spur ran west along the northern bank of the Snake toward Pasco. Riparia did have a post office, the store, and the depot. But in our young eyes, it was a metropolis with endless possibilities for new experience, fun and excitement.

Sometimes in the long evenings of mid-summer when my father



## Riparia school stands in sun

This building was the Riparia school which discontinued classes in 1961. Believed to be the third school building in Riparia, it was built in the 1930s. To the left of the school, a tennis court marks three unknown graves from the early days.

drove the wagon into Riparia with the day's packed fruit, he would take us swimming in the Snake River on a little sandy beach, just below the town side of the bridge which crossed the river. I recall how clear the water looked, very light green near the surface shading to darker green as it got deeper. Just outside the General Store at Riparia, there was a wooden bench which always had several "old-timers" enjoying the sun, watching the limited goings on about them, and bragging of past exploits. During World War I, a contingent of soldiers was stationed at Riparia to guard the bridge from feared sabotage. They were as close as we got to the war, in terms of soldiers, although we felt war's impact in other ways.

The "off-time" antics of the soldiers were a source of much talk. For instance, a few of the more adventurous soldiers entertained the populace by diving off the bridge which crossed the river. They crawled out on a brace at the highest point in the bridge in the middle of the river and dove in the swirling waters below. Once, one of the divers injured his back seriously, and a few of the soldiers immediately put out from shore in a row boat to pick him up. I never did know the outcome.

My brother Neil and I attended school for the first four grades at the little square schoolhouse "across the tracks." From our house, we took a path through the alfalfa field for about 200 yards, dipped down the bank to the stream, and crossed it on a foot bridge which was about four feet above the water, or crossed it by stepping from stone to stone when the water was especially low. Then we went up the bank on the other side to a gate to the railroad right-of-way, and across the tracks to the second gate which opened directly on the dusty, country road. Across the road and about fifty yards to the right was the gate to the school yard. The school building was almost in the center of the school yard. Immediately behind the school, the ground began to rise, and two paths led from the school to the two uphill corners of the school yard to the boys' and girls' toilets or "outhouses." These were three-holers.

A large, canvas curtain, which could be raised and lowered, divided the one, square school room. On one side, the first four grades met, and the upper four grades had the other side. There was a large, coal burning furnace on one side in the middle of the room, half on the lower grade's side, and half on the upper grade side. This was an iron furnace, with a huge tin shield around it.

Mother and dad had decided that Neil and I should start school to-



gether. As I was sixteen months older than Neil, this meant that I was held back until Neil had passed his sixth birthday. I'll always remember that first day of school. Mother had made a lunch for both of us, but it was packed in one container, which we shared in carrying as we started across the field to the school. I was apprehensive, and I didn't know what to expect. The teacher was calm, smiled a lot, and didn't ask us to do anything we couldn't handle. I remember running home to tell my mother that I really liked school.

Father had given the land for the school and was the head of the school board. We always housed the teachers in a second, small house on our property -- about a quarter of a mile from our house. I found out later that this was definitely not a good arrangement for Neil and me. The teachers, in order not to appear to favor us, tended to be more exacting in the way they treated us. Our teacher for the first and second grades was Mrs. Kneen, while her husband taught the upper four grades. A Miss Garrelts, an older, kindly spinster was the teacher when we were going through third and fourth grades. The one big Dictionary for the whole school was kept on the stand on the upper grade side. Pupils in the lower grades could get permission to go to the other side to look up words.

I recall one incident involving the Dictionary when I was in the second grade. Mr. Kneen was also the chief disciplinarian. Mrs. Kneen would go as far as slapping your open palm with a ruler, but if a more serious "crime" was involved which would call for a "whipping," Mrs. Kneen would send the pupil to Mr. Kneen with the instruction to report that "I am here to be punished." Mr. Kneen never questioned his wife's judgment; he just led the culprit out into the common hall, got a switch down from its perch on top of a cabinet, and gave the pupil a few half-hearted licks. We all liked Mr. Kneen because we knew his heart wasn't in the matter. It was more difficult for him than it was painful for the culprit.

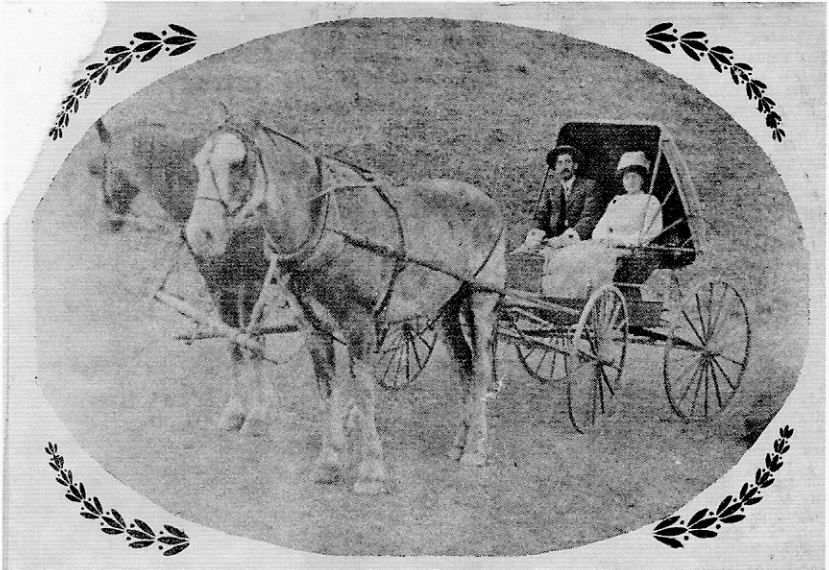
On one occasion when I was sent in for punishment, I went into the upper-class room but pretended that I was there to look up a word in the Dictionary. I stayed for quite a while and then returned to my room. At recess, Mrs. Kneen questioned her husband about my punishment, and Mr. Kneen said that I used the Dictionary, but didn't report to him for punishment. I then learned that my judgment was very bad in this ploy. This time when Mr. Kneen switched me, I felt that for the first time he really had his heart in it.

Our school played a part in my memories of childhood Christmases. There was a little rail junction [Canyon] about four miles north of our school, with a general store, a post-office, and its own small school [the Canyon School #160]. One year, it apparently had been decided to hold a two-community Christmas celebration for the children of the two rural schools. We were all gathered, in fact crowded, into the one room of this school. Father was the Santa Claus, standing on a raised platform in front of the gathering; at one side of the stage there was a Christmas tree decorated with paper chains made by the kids, strings of strung cranberries, and other homemade decorations. He called out the name of each child as he picked up a gift from under the tree, and when a hand went up in the crowd, the gift started its journey, hand to hand over the heads of those assembled.

I remember the games we used to play. We played baseball out in the open field, just outside the school yard. It was uneven, and there were badger holes. Sometimes the ball rolled down one of these holes, and the game had to be called until the ball could be retrieved. The ball was handmade. A small, hard rubber ball provided the core around which plain white twine was wrapped very tight. When the ball got to the size of a baseball, the end was tucked under, and black mechanic's tape was wound tightly around the twine.

There seemed to be an open invitation to all the neighbors to have Sunday dinner with us. On Saturday, mother, the hired kitchen help and my Aunt Opal -- if she was staying with us at the time -- spent the day cooking. Chickens were caught, their necks wrung, and feathers stripped off. They were cut up into frying sections. A half dozen or more loaves of bread were baked. Pies were made -- apple, lemon, apricot, cherry, or mince. At least one three layer coconut cake was baked. Sometimes butter would be churned. We had two types of churns. One was a barrel-like keg which was supported on a frame and turned with a handle. There was a little glass window set in the oak lid, and one could see when the little yellow chunks appeared that the butter was about ready to mould. The other churn was a tube-like affair, wider at the bottom than the top. A plunger, with the handle sliding up and down through a hole in the wooden lid, provided the churning power. Again, a little window in the lid indicated when the butter was ready.

Pickles, jams, and jellies were identified and set out. When the family went to bed on Saturday night, mother was sure that there would be

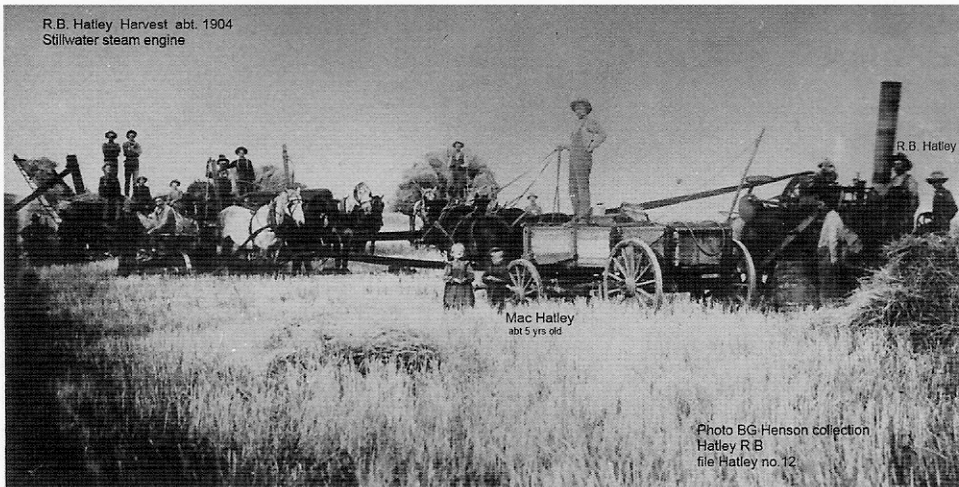


enough food for whoever showed up for Sunday dinner. During the nice days of late spring and summer, the tables would be arranged near the Lombardy Poplar trees to insure shade. Tablecloths would be spread on the tables. Places would be set; there was always one smaller table for the kids, apart a bit from the longer tables which were set end-to-end.

The guests would begin to show up, driving up in spring wagons with their children. Usually, we knew of at least a few who had said they would be present; but others, who had not indicated their presence, could be counted on to appear. With the family, the hired help, and the guests and children, around twenty or more would eventually share the Sunday dinner. A portion of the food was always held out for those who could be counted on to arrive late. After the meal, the women immediately cleaned the table and washed the dishes. Then they gathered in a group on the lawn to talk. The men stood around talking for awhile and then migrated toward the barnyard to appraise the animals. Sometimes, in spite of full bellies, there would be calf roping and steer riding contests.

Eventually, families would gather, hitch the horses to their outfits, and head for home. The family would gradually settle down to quiet conversation and planning the next day's activities. I can remember being in bed with the lamp out after one of these Sunday affairs, recalling the events of the day, and wondering why we kids had to sit at a table by ourselves.

R.B. Hatley Harvest abt. 1904  
Stillwater steam engine



*R.B. Hatley threshing outfit about 1904 with Stillwater engine on right*

# Bunchgrass Historian



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