

Bunchgrass Historian

Whitman County Historical Society Quarterly

Volume 17, No. 2

Colfax, Washington

Summer, 1989



- Heilsburg Farm
- History of Barbering

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THE AUTHORS

Craig Holstine is employed by Archaeological and Historical Services, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Wa.

Ed Tower was a barber for over fifty years, chiefly in Albion and in Pullman. His essay was written about 1940.

COVER

Counter-balanced gate at Heilsburg farm.

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

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Society Business:

Whitman County Historical Society
P.O. Box 67
Colfax, WA. 99111

Memberships and subscriptions

Gwenlee Riedel
Membership Committee
Whitman County Historical Society
SW 220 Blaine
Pullman, WA 99163

Articles for Publication:

Lawrence R. Stark, Editor

The Bunchgrass Historian

P.O. Box 2371 C.S.
Pullman, WA. 99163

Current and Back Issues:

(Send \$2.50 per issue)
Susan Bohm, Sales Editor

The Bunchgrass Historian

SW 405 State Street
Pullman, WA 99163

The Gustave Heilsberg Farm

by
Craig Holstine

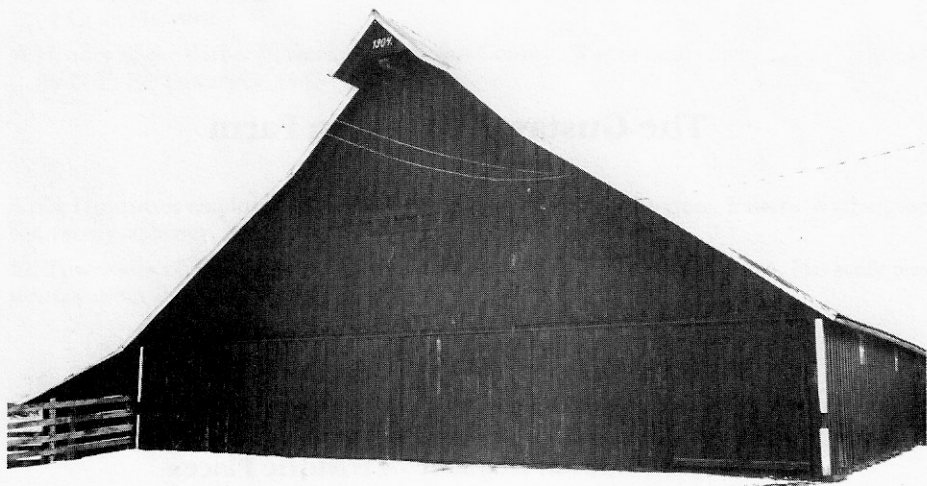
for the National Register of Historic Places

The following article is the fourth in a series taken from nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, all dealing with agriculture-related properties in Whitman County. Readers are advised that many of the structures discussed in these articles are located on private property. Those wishing to view these structures should treat them accordingly.

— editor

Nestled on a gently sloping terrace above Union Flat Creek ca. 11 miles southwest of Colfax is the Gustave Heilsberg Farm. From the complex of seventeen compactly arranged historic buildings, the predominant view is to the northwest down the open valley past the townsite of Wilcox, a small farming settlement now vanished but for two frame structures standing 0.25 mile from the farm. Grain fields cover rolling Palouse hills in every direction.

The buildings at the Heilsberg Farm represent what may be the most complete complex of historic farm structures in the county. Without exemption all the buildings retain a high degree of structural integrity. Together they meet the registration requirements of the property type "Farmsteads" established in the Multiple Property Listing for Grain Growing in Eastern Washington. The horse barn appears individually to meet the registration requirements of the property type "Barns, Subgroup: Rectangular."



Horse Barn, 1904

Perhaps appropriately, the largest and most impressive structure (the horse barn) stands at the approximate center of the complex. Buildings serving primarily domestic uses stand to the west, while livestock, grain, and farm implement storage are focused to the east. All but two of the structures date from the turn of the century to the 1930s; the other two buildings (the granary and its adjacent annex) date from the 1950s and 1960s. Their constituent materials and style of construction are compatible with the other buildings and do not constitute a visual intrusion at the site. As grain storage facilities, they enhance the functional diversity and completeness of the property; but because they are not yet 50 years old and are not of exceptional significance, they must be considered as non-contributing elements on the property.

The two strongest features at the farm are the horse barn and the residence. Both are undoubtedly National Register eligible on their own merits. Both bear the personal touch of Gustave Heilsberg, although he did not actually construct the house. He did build the barn, however, in 1904 apparently before any of the other buildings were present on the site. It is a wide, single gable, typical Western style barn of board and batten construction. Resting atop a stone foundation, the barn measures 55 X 60 feet and is at least 30 feet high at the ridge beam. Its corrugated metal roof

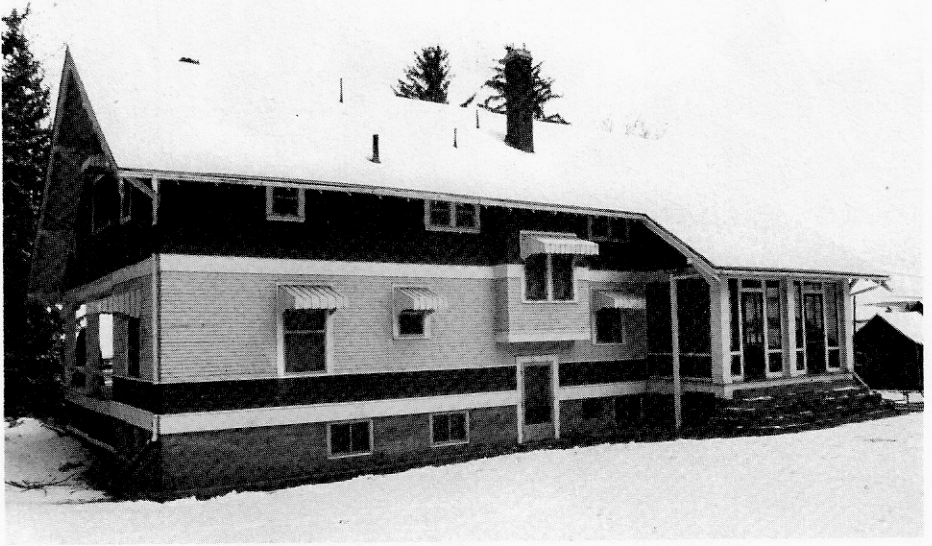


Heilsburg House, built 1914

extends lower on the north side to cover an open-sided storage and feed bay in the adjacent livestock yard. Fenestration is sparse, with only four wood sash windows just under the roof eave on the south side. The entire ground level front wall consists of wood doors mounted on rollers that slide along a metal track running the entire width of the building at the height of the roof eave. Centered immediately above is another sliding wood door entering into the hayloft. Directly above the upper door and extending out from the wall is a beam on which is mounted a pulley block used for hoisting hay to the upper level loft. Over the pulley block is a protruding hay hood on which the construction date of 1904 is painted.

Wood floors cover most of the structure's interior. The original floor plan has been retained, as have the original wooden stalls on which hang the names of the draft horses that last occupied them in the late 1930s: Daisy, Nig, Andy, Flossie, Floria, Pearl, Bill, Fanny, and Charlie. With the horses gone, most of the floor space is now used for parking vehicles and antique farm machinery. Hay is still stored in the enormous loft on the second level.

The residence near the west edge of the nominated property is perhaps second only to the horse barn in significance. Constructed in 1914 by J.R.



Rear of house

Good, a Colfax contractor, the house is in many ways a typical bungalow of its day. Sided with shiplap on the lower half and wood shingles under the eaves and on the gables, the house measures 40 X 50 feet. The gently sloping, side-facing single gable roof has wide boxed eaves and decorative brackets. The decorative eaves are mirrored in two matching front-facing gable dormers and a gable portico over the front stairs. Concrete steps lead to the wooden deck of the porch, whose awning is supported by boxed columns. The porch wraps around the house from the northwest corner across the front and east sides and extends around the southeast corner to the back door off the kitchen. The porch along the east side of the house has been enclosed with screens and a screen door opens onto the front porch. All fenestration consisting of sash windows is original, as are the doors.

The foundation of the bungalow is unusually stout, reportedly measuring about 3 feet thick and 3 feet deep. Gravel from nearby Union Flat Creek was used in the concrete for the foundation. In the full basement are a pantry, furnace room, a meat smoker constructed of concrete, and a photographic dark room installed by John Heilsberg. The floor plan of the main and upper floors is unchanged, with hardwood floors throughout. Only the kitchen in the southeast corner of the house has a newer linoleum floor. The room is spacious, with original cupboards and a dumbwaiter rising from the basement. Shelves separate the kitchen and dining room, with wood doors opening into the kitchen and decorative glass doors fac-

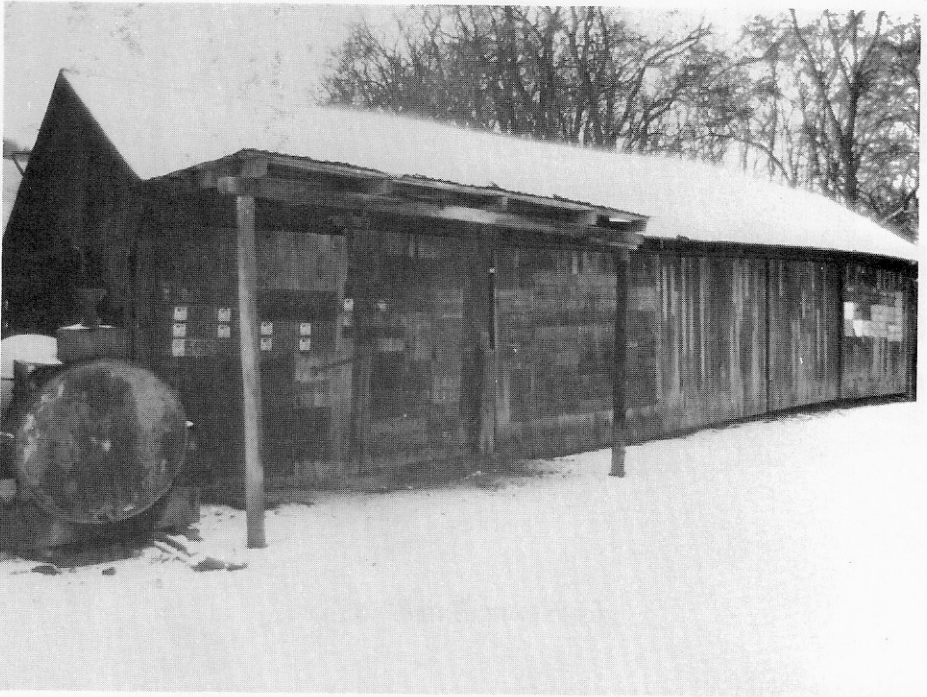


Ice House, Butcher Shop

ing the dining room in the northeast corner of the main floor. Gustave and Johanna's piano (she played) stands in the living room, which occupies the northwest quarter of the main floor. The chandeliers have been removed from that room, but original tiles still decorate the fireplace. Boxed columns resembling those on the porch rise from atop dividers between the living room and the dining room. A bathroom and master bedroom located in the southwest quarter of the main floor have been slightly remodeled.

Each of Gustave and Johanna Heilsberg's sons had his own bedroom on the upper floor. All the rooms have walk-in closets, original woodwork, and their walls are plastered and painted, never having been papered. Side doors exit the bedrooms onto two sleeping porches on the east and west sides of the house under the gables. A toilet and linen closet are centrally located at the top of the stairs. On the landing midway up the staircase is a window seat affording a view out the rear of the house.

Directly opposite the back door is the icehouse and butcher shop. Measuring 20 X 25 feet, the building is of concrete construction with soil and rocks piled against its side and rear walls and on its roof to provide insulation. A single insulated door enters the icehouse on the building's east half where ice cut from nearby Union Flat Creek was stored. Two sliding wooden doors with glass panes enter the butcher shop on the west half. Perhaps more than any other single feature on the property, the butcher shop reflects Gustave Heilsberg's life as a butcher before he became a grain



Automobile Garage

farmer. It is equipped with meat hooks and a folding cutting board mounted in a wall. On the far west end of the building, Heilsberg installed a built-in doghouse, complete with arched entryway at ground level.

Behind the icehouse/butcher shop are various ancillary buildings reflecting the self-sufficient nature of the farm and its inhabitants. There is a chicken house (reportedly moved in from the earlier Heilsberg farmstead), a stoutly-built hog shed, a stone root cellar with a frame upper level containing a cider press, and another shed of undetermined utility.

Southeast of the house is perhaps the most dilapidated, but one of the most interesting, structures on the farmstead. The garage is of flush-board construction and has a gable roof. Providing entry are sliding and hinged wooden doors to which have been nailed every license plate from every automobile ever owned by the Heilsbergs. Just as he retained the names of his draft horses, John Heilsberg kept a memento from all of his and his father's vehicles. Inside the garage are automobiles dating from the first half of the century, including the roadster in which John first dated his wife Elizabeth.

Adjacent to the garage is the machine shop. It more than any other building bears John Heilsberg's signature. The two-story concrete structure consists of a metal shop on the ground floor and a carpentry shop on



Oil Building, Seed Treatment & Bunkhouse

the upper level. Tools, lathes, and machinery of every description lay about the place, more or less as John left them, testaments to the man's mechanical skill, ingenuity and resourcefulness.

To the north is a complex of three frame buildings more or less joined into one. On the west is the oil building where fuels and all-purpose oils used on the farm are stored. To the immediate east is the so-called seed treating building in which grains to be used as seed stock were chemically treated before planting. North of that structure is the bunkhouse, which, like the other two adjacent buildings, is a neatly painted red frame building with white trim on its wood sash windows. The bunkhouse serves as a reminder of the days when harvest crews were temporarily boarded on the farm. The building is rather small (measuring 15 X 23 feet) and could not have housed a very large crew.

Northeast of the bunkhouse and the horse barn is a frame structure standing on a stone and timber pier foundation. Measuring 36 X 45 feet, the dilapidated flush-board building has a gable, sheet metal roof that extends over its east side providing covered parking for various antiquated farm machinery, some personally designed by John Heilsburg.

Immediately to the east is the granary built by John Heilsberg and granary annex constructed by John and Harold Heilsberg in the 1950s and 1960s, respectively. The earlier of the two buildings is the main granary, or



Bunkhouse

elevator as it is called, reflecting the device known as an elevator installed on its interior to carry grain from trucks into storage bins, which are presumably of cribbed construction. The building has wood shingles on its walls above the high concrete foundation. On the building's east side is a sliding wood door covering a pit into which trucks dump grain to be stored in the structure. A sliding vehicle door on the north end provides entry for truck loading. The adjacent annex stands only about one foot west of the main granary. It is of flush-board construction, reinforced with ca. 10-inch diameter wood poles anchored vertically in the ground next to the concrete foundation. The poles are lashed to the building's sides for added support. Together the structures provide "home" or temporary storage for about 20,000 bushels of grain.

South of the granary are two barns joined together to form one structure measuring 20 X 100 feet. Reportedly moved on to the site from the farmstead first occupied by Gustave Heilsberg, the barns are of weathered flush-board construction atop post foundations. Their interiors are essentially empty, open from end to end, and lacking any facilities such as stalls or hay lofts. The structures are referred to by the Heilsbergs as the "cattle barns," and have apparently been used for sheltering cattle and storing farm equipment. Although the structures were not built at their present location, they apparently were moved here during the period of significance. They do reflect an additional facet of farming on the Heilsberg place (cattle raising), and should be considered as contributing elements on the property.

Overall the Gustave Heilsberg Farm comprises a nearly perfect assemblage of early twentieth century farm buildings unhampered by modern intrusions. Not only is the complex rich in all diversity of structural types, it is also enhanced by the retention of all or nearly all original buildings, a rare occurrence on wheat farms that have operated continuously for over three-quarters of a century. Even more striking is the degree of architectural integrity retained by all the buildings.

Statement of Significance - Gustave Heilsberg Farm

Gustave Heilsberg was born to German parents in southwestern Russia in 1867. It is not known when he left the country of his birth, but in doing so he joined over 100,000 other German-Russians who came to the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. So many eventually settled in the Pacific Northwest that their migration constitutes one of the most massive moves to the region by a single ethnic group.

Their odyssey began in Germany in the eighteenth century where persistent warfare, dislocation, economic deprivation, and in some cases religious persecution drove thousands to seek new homes abroad. While some went to North America, others turned eastward, lured by promises of Catherine II, Empress of Russia, and herself a German by birth. In the early 1760s Russia was a backward country, lagging far behind the West in agricultural development, and locked into the medieval system of serfdom. Catherine hoped that by attracting foreign settlers to the great expanses of uninhabited arable land in southwestern Russia, she could accelerate her adopted nation's development. In the early 1760s she offered free land, exemption from taxation (for a limited time) and military service (in perpetuity), interest-free loans, and free passage to Russia to anyone willing to swear an oath of allegiance to the crown.

Peoples of many nationalities accepted Catherine's generosity, the vast majority being German peasant farmers. They congregated in colonies and maintained their linguistic and cultural identity. For a century the transplanted Germans were models of productivity and the envy of their Russian neighbors. Then, in the early 1870s, the Russian government repealed some privileges extended to the colonies, including exemption from military service. The action prompted a mass exodus from their adopted



Cattle Barn

homeland, with most German Russians emigrating to the U.S. Perhaps not surprisingly, since they were nearly all farmers, most of them did not stay on the East Coast but went directly to the Mid West. Completion of the transcontinental railroads brought several thousand of these latter-day pilgrims to the Pacific Northwest in the 1880s.

Gustave Heilsburg was somewhat atypical of this human phenomenon. He was reportedly not a farmer but a butcher by trade. It is not known when he left Russia, but it must have been after the great German Russian exodus of the 1870s. He went first to Australia, but by 1892 was in Nebraska, where his son Ewald was born. Gustave and his wife Johanna had four sons in all, the other three being Joseph, John, and Nathan. Joseph was born in Russia before the couple emigrated; John and Nathan were born in America, John in 1896 and Nathan sometime thereafter.

The family appears to have arrived in Whitman County shortly after the turn of the century, most probably in 1902. They settled on Union Flat Creek, where some of the county's first pioneers had settled in 1869. The creek was reportedly named for the Union sympathizers who took up lands along its banks, in contrast to Rebel Flat Creek to the north where new arrivals with decidedly Southern leanings congregated. Stockmen found Union Flat Creek ideal with its high grass and sheltered home sites in the shallow valley. Early grain farmers eagerly took up lands in the valley bottom, avoiding the rolling hills for fear they lacked the soil and mois-

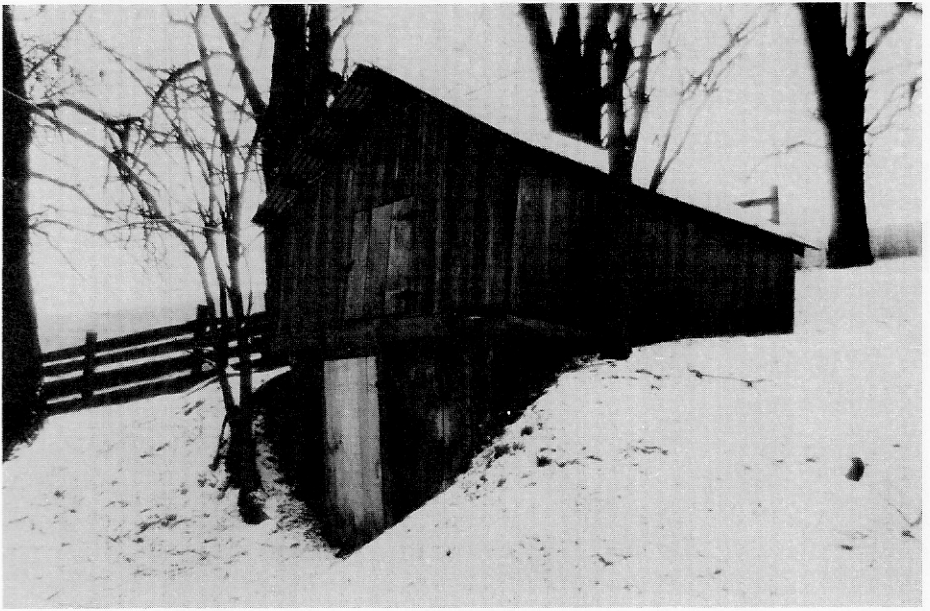


Seed Treatment Building

ture needed to sustain wheat crops. Once that misconception was dispelled by the 1880s, the adjacent uplands were quickly taken up and put under cultivation. The small town of Wilcox, supposedly named for Robert Wilcox, the first postmaster, was established and had a post office by 1886.

By the time Gustave Heilsberg arrived, all the choicest farmland had already been homesteaded in Whitman County. For reasons now unknown, he decided to locate at Wilcox where he purchased the property on which the nominated farm buildings now stand. It is not known whether he bought all of his land at once from a single owner, but by 1910 Heilsberg had acquired 718 acres in Secs. 11 and 14, T15N, R42E. (He eventually amassed over 1600 acres). While maintaining several head of cattle, horses, and hogs, his primary preoccupation was with wheat growing. At last one-twentieth of his cultivated acreage was required to grow feed for the draft horses needed for harvesting, plowing, and other tasks requiring horsepower.

In 1904 Gustave built the huge horsebarn that today still displays that date under its high gable. At that time the family did not live on the present site but on a farmstead reportedly "over the hill in the next draw" south of the nominated property. He is also reported to have built most of the other buildings on the site, with the exception of the house, chicken house, and two barns that have been joined to form a single structure on



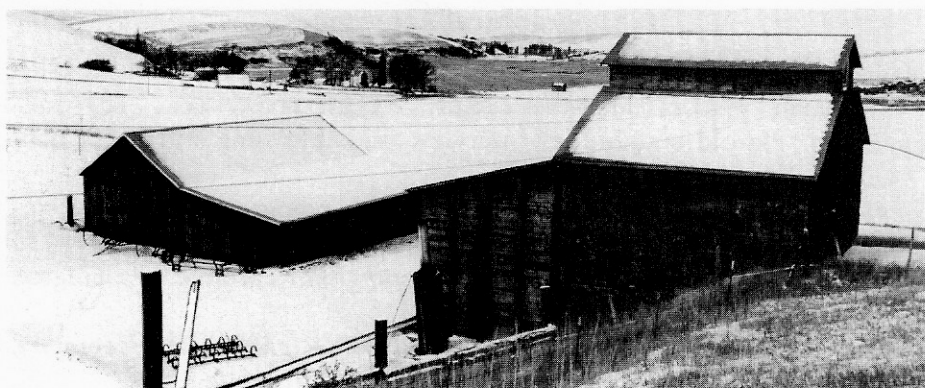
Root Cellar

the east edge of the complex. Those barns were moved to their present location from the older farmstead first occupied by the Heilsbergs.

In 1914 Gustave hired J.R. Good to build his house. Good was a noted contractor in Colfax, where several bungalows stand today with his name cast in the concrete of their front steps. Heilsberg reportedly worked closely with Good on numerous design details for the house. When completed, at a cost of \$4,000, the house was the masterpiece of solid construction that Union Flat Creek neighbors referred to as “the best built house in the county.” Gustave’s insistence that the foundation be much thicker and stronger than the standard variety installed under most bungalows of the day appears to have been the wandering immigrant’s way of putting down permanent roots. The house design also reflects the family’s size: a master bedroom on the main floor with four bedrooms, one for each son.

It is not known for sure but the nearby icehouse/butcher shop was probably built about the same time, possibly by J. R. Good. Like the bungalow, it is built with six-inch thick concrete walls, and reflects the personal touch of Gustave, seen particularly in the butcher shop where he practiced the trade he favored before taking up farming. The Heilsbergs spent enjoyable, albeit laborious, hours filling the adjacent ice house with ice from Union Flat Creek.

At the age of 59, Gustave died of dropsy while visiting an Oregon health resort, in 1926. (His widow Johanna died in the later 1950s.) Prior to his



Implement Shed, Granary. Wilcox townsite in rear.

passing, Gustave had bought farms for his two surviving sons (Joseph and Ewald) in the Wilcox area. John, an unmarried son living at home, assumed the main farm. Later he married, and farmed and lived there the rest of his life with his wife Elizabeth.

John was somewhat of a mechanical genius, fabricating many of the pieces of hardware that today give the place its special character. One item for which John was responsible is the heavy stone with a hole drilled in its center and serving as a counterbalance for the cantilevered wooden gate southwest of the barns. He must have inherited from his father a propensity for preservation of everything constructed, used, or driven by the family. Parked in the storage building are numerous farm implements dating from early in the century, several of which bear John's customized modifications. In the dilapidated garage are old automobiles once used by both Gustave and John, and nailed to the front doors and walls of the garage are the license plates from every auto owned by the Heilsbergs.

Perhaps the most unusual item on the farm, the most reflective of Heilsberg's sense of time and history, is a small metal plaque mounted over a circular concrete water trough in front of the horse barn. The plaque reads, "Carp hatched in 1922 caught by Harold Heath 1924 in Snake River & put in water by John Heilsberg." In the trough, the carp, amazingly, is still alive and well in his upper-60s in his transplanted home high above the Snake River.

The commemorative plaque on the trough, as well as the old cars and plates, tell only part of the story. John Heilsberg did more than just save things, he maintained them in good working order. His abilities as a carpenter and handy-man resulted in the farm receiving careful maintenance for over a half century beyond Gustave's death. John's energy and personal desire to keep the building well-maintained has created a showcase of his family's hard won accomplishments.

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A History of the Barber Business in Whitman County, Washington

**by
D. E. "Ed" Tower**

Undated Manuscript, possibly ca. 1940

About the year 1877 an elderly man, distinct because of his long white curls, in a unclad frame building started the first barber shop in Colfax.

Colfax was at that time a small frontier town with few or no brick buildings, between two hills, consisting mostly of saloons and livery barns. Gambling was the social pasttime and as time passed Mr. Hogue took to the habit as did many others. This is evident from the fact that he was beaten to death by a man with a revolver, in a poker game, in Farmington, which was a small, rough interior town near the east border of Whitman county and the State line. There is quite a story concerning the capture of the man who murdered Mr. Hogue. They finally caught him by means of watching a mysterious Indian who took walks every day, and by following him found that he was carrying food to this man who had built a bunk up in a tree to prevent the officers from finding him.

Quite like Colfax, only about five years later, Pullman and Palouse possessed a very similar barber shop. Garfield, Oakesdale and Tekoa soon followed.

The barber shop of that day was quite different from that of today, having an old type tip back barber chair, and a hot water pot on the stove, (a hot turkish towel before or after shaving was unheard of), a box of sawdust on the floor for a cuspidor which would be emptied about twice a year.

George Hunter was possibly the first man to barber in Pullman while Henry Williamson was the first to have a regular shop. Later a man known as Windy Dick, which from his name you could easily imagine was famous for his ability to talk, also had a shop.

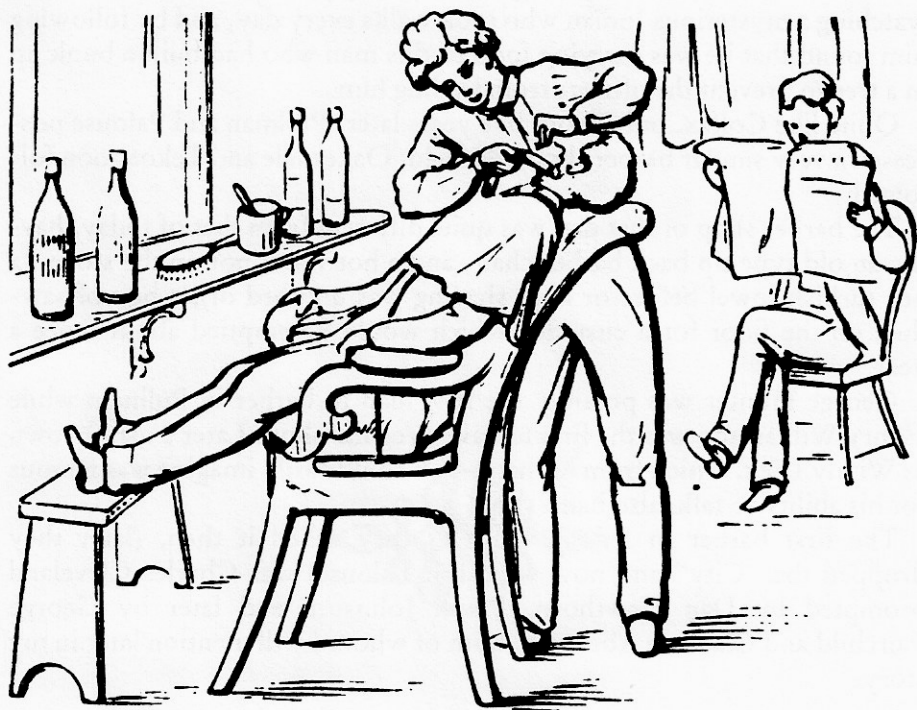
The first barber in Palouse City as they called it then, (later they dropped the "City" and now we call it Palouse) was Charles Cleveland prompted by Dan Hawthorn, Frank Johnston and later by George Fairchild and Clarence Abernath, both of whom I will mention later in my story.

After a lapse of about fifteen or twenty years I will drop back to Colfax where I find considerable improvement in equipment. Some of the shops that had the old stationary chairs now had the revolving as well as the reclining ones. I find such barbers as Tagert who would drive you away from his shop with an abusive story and go out in the street and bring you in the next time you came to town, Bill Dumdi, Lou Erwin, Tom Hampton and last the little Frenchman whom they called Frenchie, who would say to the customer, "just close your chops and I'll try and stay on the outside".

Bill Dumdi kept a nice clean place, quite up-to-date for that time. Lou Erwin's place was quite distinct because of curios such as old guns, stuffed birds, fish pond, even live rattle snakes. Many people went there just to see the collection.

In 1898 the writer opened his first barber shop in Guy which later was renamed Albion to avoid being guyed so much. In a roughly clad little room with an old fashioned chair which Grandfather Kenoyer gave me, I worked off and on for three years. Then I decided I would make it pay or quit. Well, the answer is I am still a barber.

March 18, 1901 the Legislature of the State of Washington passed a law entitled, "An Act to regulate the practice of barbers, the licensing of persons to carry on such practice, and to provide punishment for its violation."



The State Board of Examiners consisted of F. C. Brown, President, W. D. Jackman, Secretary, and B. Sperling, Treasurer. This act also provided for barber shops to be closed on Sundays. This was the first real move toward progress in the barber business.

At that time the business was conducted without hours or prices. The writer was working in Colfax then for board and room and four dollars (\$4.00) per week.

Prices were twenty-five cents for a haircut and fifteen cents for a shave, and the cut-rate places were 15¢ and 10¢. Consequently the managers forced their help to graft for anything and in every way to get extra money, such as taking off warts and moles and other more or less unnecessary work for exorbitant rates, and many times from 7 o'clock in the morning to one and two o'clock at night. They were supposed to close at midnight. Many managers would say get the money or move on. In fact, you had to do something besides cut hair and shave at that price to get any money.

The barber who could drink the most and work, chew, smoke and do fancy didoes on his strop with his razor was a favorite. I completed a shave in three and one-half minutes just to show a friend what I could do.

The business gradually developed from a rough, unsanitary business to one you might like to enter. After the State went dry in 1908 we thought our business was ruined, but much to our surprise it got better. People had more money to spend with us and the price advanced from twenty-five cents for a hair cut to thirty-five cents, five cents for a neck shave and fifteen cents for a shave. The barbers then began to advertise clean service. I believe I was one of the first in the State to advertise two clean towels with each shave. We catered then to shaves more than today. The "safety" had not taken the shaving away from the barber shop. Now about all we have left is the hair cut.

As time went on the State passed sanitary laws and the Board of Examiners developed technical catch questions to fool the barber in examination. The school was turning out many premature barbers. The shop owners would not hire a man from the school if he knew it.

Our State laws and our Unions have been weak in letting poor workmen enter the profession and demand the wages and support of the Union.

The barber school did not teach the student to work as he would have to work in a first class shop. We made laws and the school system repealed them while we were not on the job at Olympia, therefore let this be a warning to the coming barbers — get organized and make laws to protect your business and not to make money for the schools.

Another evil of the barber business is jealousy between workmen. I have seen them even come to blows, such as the case in 1903 when Dean Kim-

brough, Director of Music at the State College, ventured in the barber business, bought the Club Barber Shop in Pullman and was having it managed by Charles Collins. There developed a jealousy between he and one of his workmen, Charles Hulse. Collins found reason to discharge Hulse and it eventually came to blows.

