

LATAH COUNTY MUSEUM SOCIETY

Quarterly Bulletin
Kenneth B. Platt, Editor

April 1, 1974
Vol. 3, No. 2

New hands at the helm have taken Society affairs onto bold new courses since the annual election on January 5. In command are the following, comprising the Board of Trustees:

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Museum Director Larry French of Potlatch and Curator Lou Cormier of Moscow continue to serve in an advisory capacity to the Board.

The first new venture was to hold the February meeting of the Board at Potlatch. The meeting explored possibilities of establishing a community history center there, to be associated with and assisted by the County Museum Society. Potlatch Mayor Paul Tobin offered free use of a room in City Hall for museum display purposes. Larger space in the former city gymnasium, offered by Mrs. Clara Graham, was found impractical to insure. Hopes for salvaging the old Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway depot, first structure built in the town, were dashed on finding that a large concrete vault in the center of the building precluded moving it to city ground as required by the railway.

The Potlatch area has an unusually rich heritage of pioneer logging and lumbering lore and artifacts, all present agreed. The original Potlatch Mill was the largest white pine mill in the world when built in 1906. The town of Potlatch, though company-planned and -owned, was a model of order and spaciousness at that time. Its "mill town" appearance, which still carries over under private ownership, is unique in the region and worth preserving for its own sake, some residents feel. Engine No. 1 of the original W. I. & M. locomotive fleet, long retired and donated to the city, stands on exhibit in front of City Hall, an enduring reminder of the years of steam power and of the "timber beast" stalwarts who swarmed the woods and the town to keep that power busy.

Such historic objects and values as these cannot be moved to one central location, but must be preserved and enjoyed where they are. The Society leadership visualizes a cooperative system under which facilities for preservation and display of items of special local area interest would be established in each principal community in the county.

The April meeting of the Board will be held in Kendrick, where community history interests there and at Juliaetta will be explored. The famous train wreck of 1899 at Kendrick, the early tramways at both towns, the great Potlatch River floods of 1899 and 1900, and two devastating Kendrick fires are among the things that should be commemorated there. Fine private collections of early photos, newsclips, telephones, and phonographs have been made by Herman Schupfer in Kendrick. In Juliaetta the Noble family exhibits hundreds of early household items and hand implements in a unique old residence called "The Castle." These collections will be viewed, and possible ways of incorporating them into the County Museum record and preservation system will be discussed.

The meeting will seek ways to expand interest and membership in the LGS, as a stronger county-wide organization is needed to stimulate and support local preservation efforts. An integrated county-wide numbering and record system for all collected items would have many

advantages, such as facilitating rotation of displays among communities, reducing needless duplication, and making a full catalog of museum items available to schools, libraries, and the various community display centers. For this the record system already established at the McConnell Mansion would be extended to other collections around the county, with the Society's administrative staff guiding and assisting.

The September meeting of the Board is tentatively planned to be held at Genesee to explore possibilities of a community historic interest center there. A display to show the evolution of farm equipment from pioneer to modern times would be especially suitable there, if space can be found. Preservation of the 1888 Northern Pacific Railway depot offers a possibility for small and medium items. The many empty barns in the Genesee community suggest another possibility.

A second new venture was approved at the March Board meeting--a project to print 1,000 activity calendars to go on sale at the County Fair next fall. The calendars will cover 15 months, beginning with October, 1974. For each month there will be a large historic picture from the county. Historic dates for the county will be noted where they occur. Scheduled meeting dates of the County Commissioners, granges, civic clubs, etc.; community days, school terms, and election dates; and other known dates of interest will be shown. A selling price of \$2.00 to \$3.00 each is under study.

Museum Director Larry French was authorized to proceed with arrangements for printing. Clifford Ott is to choose suitable pictures from his large collection. Members should get busy now lining up sales and sale outlets. Proceeds will go to the general operating fund of the Society.

The Auxiliary idea mentioned in the last Quarterly Bulletin is in abeyance for the time being.

Oral History at Full Steam

With the coming of spring and the return of Sam Schragger from a month's absence, both he and Rob Moore once again are out in the county interviewing and recording old-timers with pioneer recollections. Wives Laura Schragger and Emily Moore are assisting in interviewing women, to get more of their views of how things were in pioneer times. Experience has shown that women recall different things when talking to another woman than when talking to a man.

A total of 70 hours of original tape recordings now have been obtained, Sam and Rob report. Of this total, 30 hours have been transcribed in rough form, and 12 hours are in final form. About 12 hours of editing time are required for each hour of final transcript. Much of this is being done in night overtime work. Office secretary Sherrie Fields continues daily with transcription work at the project office on East 2nd Street.

We are happy to be able to announce that the Society's goal of \$5,750 in matching funds for the project has finally been reached. The last \$177.34 needed to complete the Museum Society's share was contributed by Tom and Elizabeth Wahl. A tabulation shows that 131 separate donations made up the total. A hearty "thank you" to all who contributed.

While this meets our immediate goal, additional donations would be welcome and would enable us to extend the project beyond August. Such an extension would make possible the recording of a greater number of significant interviews. Don't forget that each \$50.00 donated entitles the donor to a life membership, which may be assigned to someone else if desired.

Meantime, a \$2,000 supplementary grant given by the state for copying old photos and other printed materials to accompany the oral record is being used to good advantage. This fund has enabled Cliff Ott to print many enlargements from photos of the old Roland Hodgins and Lionel Sterner studio files. The quality of pictures being obtained is attested by requests from the State

Historical Society for more than \$300 worth of copies thus far, which they are paying for separately.

Busy Days at McConnell Mansion

The January-March quarter was a high-pressure work period for Director Larry French and Curator Lou Cormier, as well as for Karen French as secretary. Last year's exhibits were dismantled and three excellent new ones planned. Two of these--a fur trade era trapper's cabin and an 1890's bedroom--were almost fully set up. The third, a display of pioneer range cowboy's equipment, is to be worked up during the summer by the museum staff.

The bedroom exhibit is of special interest because it is in the room long occupied by Miss Ione Adair when the Mansion belonged to her family. It is furnished with the bed and dresser she used then. The large oval hand-braided rag carpet on the floor, the heavy crockery pitcher and wash basin, and the kerosene lamp are other items typical of the period. A painting done by Ione Adair of the homestead near Bovill that was sold by Dr. Adair to buy the Mansion in 1901 is part of the display.

Jan Kern, a graduate of the University of Kansas in anthropology and classical archeology, has recently joined our staff as assistant curator. Jan is volunteering her time to the museum until August in order to gain experience in museum technology. Also, Gertrude Lundquist is working as a volunteer one day a week on the photo collection. Her work is a welcome contribution on behalf of the Moscow Historical Club, which has agreed to assist us on this project.

A great deal of work has been done during the winter on the museum files and the records of acquisitions.

"I am proud of the museum and am anxious to do all I can to aid in any way I can," wrote Mabel Paulson (Mrs. Harvey) Webber recently, in a letter thanking Lou Cormier for some photos.

"I have written to a lady in Spokane for some dates

about her father-in-law, who was another old-timer of the county. I have the father and mother's wedding picture and will send it to you, and I have asked her to mail some of the family's pictures. She gave me permission to send the wedding photo to you, but I have waited for more information. I have known the family all my life, so I can give approximate dates, but she may give me more data when I hear. Sincerely,"

"We believe this [oral history] is a most worthwhile project and makes many permanent records for the Museum that otherwise would never be filed," says another letter, transmitting a \$50 contribution from the Latah County Pioneer Association on February 16. "You are to be commended on the fine work you are doing in making the Mansion into a beautiful place for the treasures of our county."

Fan mail like this helps cheer us along, and renews our energies. But now that Larry must return to full-time farm and tree plantation work at Potlatch for the next nine months, there is great need for more volunteer help at the Museum office. New objects continue to be donated, and each item must be carefully entered in the records, marked or boxed for identification, and properly stored.

Much helpful work was done on the Museum photo files during the fall and winter by two high school volunteers. Jim Manis started the work during fall quarter and did interior painting and cleanup work as well. He was unable to schedule time to continue in the winter quarter, but Tim Fleener has been continuing the photo file work. He has also helped prepare new exhibits. More help of this kind could be used to good advantage.

Museum visitors in January and February included school groups from Troy, Deary, and Bovill. The total of 457 visitors was more than double 1973 numbers for those months. A Moscow Camp Fire Girls group and the Northwest History section of the W.S.U. Faculty Women, scheduled for March 28, should bring the 3-month total to above 500. Earlier prospects for substantial numbers

of outside visitors as a by-product of Expo '74 traffic have been dimmed by the gasoline shortage, but may pick up if supplies return to normal. The same influence might bring more visits from closer at hand by people unable to take long trips this year, so we still hope to equal or better the 1973 total of over 2,000.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Truth About the Palouse Country and The Moscow Opal Mines, 1890 to 1893 are two quite different small publications that came recently to the Museum. The first is a lavishly illustrated promotional booklet (40 pages) put out by the Great Northern Railway about 1911, boosting further farm development tributary to its line from Spokane to Moscow, opened in 1906. Familiarly known as the Inland Empire Electric, this line ceased service into Moscow in 1970, a victim of the automobile and short-haul truck competition. Freight service still is maintained as far as Viola. When installed, the I. E. E. served an area along the Idaho-Washington line not reached by other railways, one rich in both freight and passenger loadings. The G. N. brochure gives an interesting picture, in particular, of agriculture in Latah County as it was then and was expected to be for the foreseeable future. Looking admittedly through promoter's eyes, yet with close reliance on statistical facts, the writer states:

"The truth about the Palouse Country, south of Spokane, is that it has never been boomed. When early settlers came 25 years ago and discovered that the great expanse of rolling hills thickly covered with bunch grass would produce wheat in almost fabulous yields, they quietly settled down to raising grain and what other farm products their own needs required and have been adding to their holdings ever since. The truth is, the Palouse farms will raise anything from wheat, oats, and barley to potatoes, berries, and fruits without the aid of irrigation, and the Palouse rancher knows it."

Going on, with an eye apparently on distribution of the brochure in corn belt communities, the writer then says: "But it is so easy to simply plow and seed and then wait for harvest time, a bare three or four months' work in the year, that it has been left for the more aggressive eastern farmer to step in and demonstrate that diversified agriculture not only quadruples the rancher's income but preserves the soil and makes consecutive crops possible in place of the former method of summer fallowing."

Here was a suggestion that found relatively few takers until peas and sweet clover came into crop rotations in the late 1920's and 1930's, replacing summer fallow, and then it was local farmers rather than newcomers who made the change.

"The Palouse Country is producing 25,000,000 bushels of grain annually (which cost an average of 30 cents per bushel to produce and market and brings an average of 75 cents) and many millions more in orchard products, livestock, hogs and poultry," we are further informed. "Two acres of Palouse land properly farmed will produce enough feed each season to feed a good dairy cow for a whole year and produce an annual income of over \$100."

Fruit growing also was extolled: "With proper cultivation, apples, pears, cherries, plums, prunes, peaches and apricots are grown to perfection. . . . Apple orchards give an annual income of from \$300 to \$1,000 per acre. . . . Cherries yield from \$500 to \$1,500 per acre. . . . Many carloads of apples from the non-irrigated orchards . . . were bought last season for export to England and Scotland."

Quoting millions of dollars spent in Spokane for eggs and dairy products imported from the Midwest, the booklet notes the opportunities for producing these items right here in the Palouse Country. Hog production likewise was acclaimed as a profitable enterprise.

Notwithstanding these many promised opportunities, the practice of general farm diversification that had died

with the passing of the original pioneer generation never was resurrected.

How different the course of agriculture in Latah County and the Palouse Country in general has been is familiar to all local residents. As one who grew up on a livestock farm at Genesee, this reviewer can testify that it was one of the few Latah County farms in that business in the 1920's. It earned economists' merit points by keeping the whole family working the year round, while lowly wheat-farming neighbors were idle much of the time, but it did not seem to bring any greater returns. Its one supreme merit--keeping the soil on the hills where nature put it and continually replenishing the organic content--served to produce rich grain crops for the next owner (not a stockman) but did not keep my father from going broke. The coming of tractors to replace horses and the unsuitability of the Palouse Country for the row crops common to diversified farming were decisive further forces in aborting the dream of the Northern Pacific promoters for this area.

The Moscow Opal Mines, by Ron Brockett of Rangely, Colorado, is fresh from the press. Based on painstaking documentary research and confined largely to a mere half-section of land, it is opposite in character from the Northern Pacific booklet reviewed above. The fact that most of the information for the report (63 pages) was drawn from old Moscow, Pullman, and Spokane newspapers adds to the interest for Latah County readers by showing that here was a fascinating story waiting to be dug out right in our own back yard. In his introduction, Brockett states:

"This writer, being personally fascinated by opal prospecting and mining, decided, since he was living in the opal belt itself, to examine the local newspapers in order to find out whether or not the so-called Moscow Opal Mines had been commercial--and to what extent. He wanted, moreover, to find out about the quality and abundance of the opals, to discover why the mining

stopped, and to learn of the general history of the mines and the people who were involved in the adventure and romance of gem stone mining."

Following this plan, Brockett came up with the following information:

"In mid-September, 1890, the son of William Leasure went to Moscow from his father's farm, which was about five miles away. He had gone to Moscow in order to sell some opals he had taken from a well on the family farm. Apparently he had little success in selling the stones until he ventured into the jewelry store of James Allen. Allen, realizing the opals' potential value, followed the boy home. Some of the local newspapers said Allen was simply out 'hunting,' but they left it to the reader to assume for what. Once having reconnoitered the area, the crafty jeweler rushed back to Moscow, hired himself a lawyer and then shot back to stake out his claim. And having driven his stakes, Allen 'sold interests' to J. M. Shields and C. H. Jones. . . .

"Once the discovery had leaked out, it was not long before citizens of both Pullman and Moscow had copied Allen's claim-jumping behavior. One newspaper account on September 18 said, 'Over 150 claims have been taken for two miles on each side of the well.' Two days later a second newspaper said that 'nearly 200 mining claims have been staked out.'"

At the height of this flurry, Mr. Leasure was told by the mining claimants that he had no right to the opals, but would be indemnified for the taking of his land. Recovering from this initial shock, he sought a lawyer of his own, who soon found that the Leasure land title included the mineral rights. He thereupon shooed the trespassers off his farm and proceeded with grain harvesting. That done, in due time he either acquiesced in or joined in subsequent mining operations on his land. Mr. Brockett's account continues:

"During the years 1891 and 1892 the major operator of the opal mines was The North American Gem Opal Mining Company. This Company mined both the Leasure and the

Patterson properties. The location of the Company's two mining areas is seen as follows:

'The North American Gem Opal Mining Company mined opal in the SW 1/4, Sec. 20, T. 15 N., R. 46 E., Willamette Meridian, Washington. The W 1/2 SW 1/4 was patented to the widow of Washington Patterson on May 7, 1889. The E 1/2 SW 1/4, and the SE 1/4 NW 1/4 was patented to Willism Leasure on Sept. 11, 1889.'

"Near the end of 1891, E. C. Hall decided to buy the Patterson property outright. This he did on November 4 for the sum of \$11,500. There was a property exchange on May 24, 1893, also, when The North American Gem Opal Mining Company paid Hall \$6,600 to obtain a 'Quit Claim Deed.'"

This deed covered parts of both the Leasure property and the Patterson property described above. The North American Gem Opal Mining Company was incorporated under the laws of Colorado, with headquarters at Denver and with capital stock of \$250,000, Crockett found. Gem outlets for this company were through large jewelry dealers in Denver and New York. Newspaper reports of alleged sales of gems in Europe by one or another of these firms at one point mentioned 5,000 carats of opals which might have come from the 'Moscow' mines, but were not definitely identified with them. Having examined all available evidence, Brockett comments:

"It might be wondered, in retrospect, why the mines were called the Moscow Opal Mines. The two properties which the North American Gem Opal Mining Company operated . . . were definitely on the Washington side of the state line. Although the school section on the Idaho side of the boundary was legally staked out, this writer could find no reference at all to the discovery of opals there. . . Perhaps the real reason why the town of Moscow was identified with the opal mines on the Washington side of the border had to do with Moscow's interest in seeing the mines developed."

The end of Moscow's opal fame was as bizarre, almost, as the beginning. At the peak of mining development, and after reaching a national reputation, the mines were idled in 1893. Litigation at high level seems to have been one factor, the 1893 national financial panic, another, and difficulties of extracting the gems from the hard basalt in which they were embedded, yet another. An attempted revival of mining by new owners of the Leasure farm was made in 1904 but apparently was given up after a few months. No subsequent attempts are mentioned. The area today is part of the John O'Donnell farm.

An interesting sidelight of the Brockett study is his account of an opal find near Troy in 1891. Claims were staked and companies formed. Newspaper reports spoke of the "Crystal Queen" and the "Gem of the Mountains." But the fire in the gems apparently did not equal that of the written word, for no commercial development followed, and no mention is made of this discovery after 1891.

While Brockett does not conclude that commercial opals were not mined in Latah County, the evidence he found nowhere clearly shows that they were. The reader must draw his own conclusions. It is an intriguing story, interestingly pursued, and well worth the reading. The author has been invited to place copies of his book with the LCMS for sale (\$3.00). Direct orders may be sent to him at Box 231, Rangely, Colorado 81648. The Moscow-Latah library also has the book.

THE VIEW AHEAD

The Latah County commissioners have allocated money from the general fund to make and install storm windows throughout the entire building. This project is scheduled for completion during the summer. The officers and staff of the Society extend special thanks to the commissioners for making possible this long-needed improvement.

The old Moscow Post Office building, now vacated, still is considered a possible future place for Museum uses, among others. Storage space at the Mansion is rapidly nearing its limit. Large new space would enable us to accept many larger objects which now must be turned away. The Society is but one of several public service and cultural groups which need such space but have no money to pay for it. We can only hope that in due time the building will be transferred to the community for public uses, at nominal cost.

A new series of Society publications, separate from the Quarterly Bulletin, to be called Local History Papers, was authorized by the Board at its March meeting. Local History Paper No. 1 will be "Some Pioneer Glimpses of Latah County," the paper presented by Kenneth Platt at the annual meeting of the Latah County Pioneer Association on February 9. It will be copyrighted by the Society and will be sold to begin accumulation of a Publication Fund for financing other local history publications in the future. An initial issue of 500 copies is planned. The selling price will depend on printing costs.

The Board hopes this first officially sponsored paper will stimulate other members and friends of the Society to write similar short papers for the series. Such papers can be valuable contributions to preservation of original historic information, or to the retrieval of previously published materials not now available in convenient form. Putting copyrights in the name of the Society will give the Society a source of needed income and also assure the writer that his work will be suitably preserved. We understand that the Cwyhee County Museum Society now has major support from sales of such papers.

Republication of John A. Platt's still popular Whispers from Old Genesee and Echoes of the Salmon River, last printed in 1962, also promises substantial future income for the Society. Arrangements have been made with Ye Galleon Press, of Fairfield, Washington, to print a Memorial Edition of 1,000 copies. The edition

will be dedicated to the pioneers of Latah, Nez Perce, Lewis, and Idaho counties as a memorial to John A. and Emma C. Platt, by their surviving children and grandchildren. It will include a map of the main story area, many added historical pictures, sketches of Mr. and Mrs. Platt, as new materials. The book also will be more attractively made up than previous editions and will be printed in larger type for easier reading.

The Board of Trustees has agreed to take 100 copies of the book for sale to members, Museum visitors and others. Delivery is expected in late summer. Advance requests for copies would be helpful in gauging demand and need not be accompanied by payment. The selling price cannot be decided until publication costs are known but is expected to be around \$6.50 to \$7.00. All previous editions were sold out within two years of issue and now change hands at \$10.00 or more when a copy can be found for sale.

NEW MEMBERS

A number of names have been added to the Society's membership roll since the list was distributed with the January 1 issue of the Quarterly Bulletin. You may want to add these names in order to update your list:
Mrs. Inez M. Blanck, 365 San Leandro Way, San Francisco
CA 94127

Mrs. Kelly Graham, Box 106, Potlatch ID 83855

Donna Hoover, RFD, Potlatch ID 93955

Trudy A. Jones (Mrs. William L.), 1019 S. Lynn, Moscow

Mrs. Yvonne Lewis, Box 524, Bovill ID 83806

William Bert McCroskey, 727 Mabelle, Moscow

Marvin Miller, Box 534, Moscow

Mrs. Luzelle Musch, Box 522, Bovill ID 83806

Edward H. Nygaard, 202 N. Howard, Moscow

Lester Otness, 27 W. 39th, Spokane WA 99203

Mrs. Rosemary C. Shull, 216 Cherry, Moscow

Mrs. G. H. Valiquette, 1327 - 11th Ave., Lewiston ID
83501

New life members are as follows:

Jean Edmiston Ashbaugh (Mrs. L. J.) Rt. 3, Box 193, Moscow

Patricia Brocke Bloomster, Star Route 2, Box 17, Sekiu
WA 94381

Frank C. Brocke, Troy ID 83871
Margie Green Brocke, Troy ID 83871
Robert Earl Clyde, Highway 95 South, Moscow
Lou Cormier, McConnell Mansion, 110 So. Adams, Moscow
Gordon W. Hauck, 8665 S.W. Woodside Drive, Portland OR
97225
Grace Green Hauck, 8665 S.W. Woodside Drive, Portland OR
Dorothy Richardson Henrikson (Mrs. J. C.), 706 No. Main,
Moscow
Kathryn Collins Howells (Mrs. Leslie), 123 No. Hayes,
Moscow
Mildred Humphrey (Mrs. Earl), 733 E. Lewis, Moscow
Alma Lauder Keeling (Mrs. G. P.), 1320 Deakin, Moscow
Dorothy Green Korn, 208 So. 28th Ave., Yakima WA 98902
John B. Miller, 8 Crestview Ave., Daly City CA 94015
Charlotte Dimond Morrison (Mrs. William), 309 Ritchie
Parkway, Rockville MD 20852
Robert J. Otness, 1640 Baker St., San Francisco CA
94115
Clifford M. Ott, 836 Orchard Ave., Moscow
La Vera M. Phillips Ott (Mrs. Clifford), 836 Orchard
Ave., Moscow
Mrs. Mary Louise Bush Perrine, 309 S. Van Buren, Moscow
Ruth Dimond Riedesel (Mrs. L. E.), 2575 Terry, Longview
WA 98632
Hannah Sandell, Troy 83871
Herman C. Schupfer, Kendrick ID 83537
Ole H. Sether, 16615 15th N E, Seattle WA 98155
Opal Tate Sether, 16615 N E, Seattle WA 98155
Nellie Edwin Sweeney, 126 West 1st, Moscow
John L. Woodworth, 4438 Gorman Drive, Lynchburg VA
24503

The names of Dr. Frederick C. Church, Dr. Jay Glover
Lldridge, and Miss Myra I. Moody, all deceased, have
been entered as life members, and their names will be
engraved on the life membership plaque which hangs in
the entrance hall of the McConnell Mansion as a part
of the permanent records of the Society.

The name of Willis Bohman, 1021 Virginia Drive S.,
Moscow, was inadvertently omitted from the published
membership list in January. He is a life member.

LATAH COUNTY
MUSEUM SOCIETY

110 South Adams Street
Moscow, Idaho 83843

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Moscow, Idaho

We hope that you will enjoy reading this copy of the Quarterly Bulletin and that you will want to become a member of the Latah County Museum Society. There are no requirements of residence or place of birth; membership is open to anyone who is interested in helping to preserve the history and lore of Latah County and to make it available to future generations.

As a member you will receive four issues of the Quarterly Bulletin each year, you will be eligible to attend and participate in all activities of the Society, and you will have the satisfaction of helping to carry on an important work. Won't you join us today? We need your support.

The attached blank is for your convenience. Membership runs for the calendar year. Payment of 1-year dues (\$2.50) will enroll you as a member until January 1975; payment of 5-year dues (\$10.00) will enroll you until January 1979.

Please return this blank with your remittance to

Mrs. H. R. Otness
P. O. Box 8104
Moscow, Idaho 83843

Checks should be made payable to Latah County Museum Society. A receipt will be mailed to you.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|---------|-------|
| Type of membership (please check): | Individual 1-year | \$ 2.50 | _____ |
| New _____ | Individual 5-year | \$10.00 | _____ |
| Renewal _____ | Individual life | \$50.00 | _____ |

Amount enclosed \$ _____

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