

LATAH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

McConnell Mansion 110 South Adams Moscow, Idaho

Quarterly Bulletin
Kenneth B. Platt, Editor

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Congratulations to Sam and Laura Schragger, long time Oral History Project workers, for made-to-order scholarships in prestigious eastern universities, to do doctoral studies in their respective fields of interest. Sam will be going to the University of Pennsylvania for a four-year study course on folklore. Laura will have a three-year course in sociology at Princeton University. For icing on the cake, the two schools are near enough to one another that Sam and Laura will be able to live in a married students' cottage at Princeton. Also, both will be near their parents' homes at Troy and Ardsley, N.Y.

And, just to show this wasn't all a great stroke of luck, both Sam and Laura were offered scholarships at two other big name universities--a clear testimony of their fine qualifications.

Sam hopes to make use of the oral history materials gathered here for part of his student work. He still plans, too, to write an adult level book for use in Idaho from these materials. Laura will take a master's degree at WSU this year before their August departure.

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Thinking of Sam and the Oral History Project reminds us that it started with him away back when, as shown by the following quote from the April, 1973, *Quarterly Bulletin*: "An oral history project has been proposed by two young men from Troy--Rob Moore and Sam Schragger. The immediate objective is to tape record the recollections of people who lived through the settlement and development of Latah County. The tapes would then

be transcribed into readable narratives. Records research would be done to verify and round out the narratives. From the combined sources would be drawn newspaper articles, a book-length general history of the County, and a children's booklet for distribution in the schools.

"Mr. Moore and Mr. Schrage both are recent college graduates in the field of creative writing. The oral history project was conceived as a means of gathering authentic materials from which to write. They are seeking a grant for their project, for which they need a sponsor such as the Museum Association."

Rob Moore dropped out after that first year, but Sam continued to lead the project to the close of field work a year ago. In that time he produced five excellent grade school level history booklets based on the lives of selected Latah County pioneers, that have sold hundreds of copies besides serving the schools of Latah and surrounding counties. He has continued down to the present to direct the work of transcribing the voice tapes of our pioneers into written records for future use. The project recorded the oral recollections of 205 Latah County men and women, and has produced more than 10,000 pages of transcribed narratives.

We may fairly say the Oral History Project has been the biggest single accomplishment of the Latah County Historical Society to date, and one which will have significance far into the future.

* * *

But oral history has been only one of a multitude of resources for local history writing lying dormant about us. The same issue of the *Bulletin* which introduced the Oral History Project also carried this item under the heading of New Challenges: "Historic accounts in search of authors are strewn richly over the Latah County landscape. Anyone with a yen to set the record down, to see his name on the title page, or any of the other urges that move people to write, can have a wide choice. Here are some to start your thinking, in no order of topic relation or priority:

"(1) George McMahon, Pioneer Pharmacist of the Palouse; (2) The 1912 Genesee State Basketball Champions; (3) The Idaho Harvester and Other Local Farm Machinery Developments; (4) Pioneer Cemeteries of Latah County; (5) The Palouse Chinaware Plant; (6) The Moscow Vinegar Works; (7) Pioneer Orchards and Fruit Handling; (8) The Moscow Brick Plant; (9) Tramlines of the Potlatch Canyons; (10) Genesee's Years of Glory (as railhead for the Clearwater basin); (11) Vanished Towns of Latah County; (12) The Saga of P.F.I. (logging out of the Palouse drainage); (13) The Indian Tradition of Potlatch; (14) The Bear Creek Train Wreck (Troy-Kendrick); (15) The Hoodoo Mines; (16) The A. P. Green Ceramic Products Enterprise; (17) Psychiana and Its Creator.

"Now if that list has stimulated your gray matter even mildly, you should have thought of half a dozen more topics equally good. Take one from this list or one of your own and get going with it. We can publish right here in the *Bulletin* papers up to 2,500 words. Longer ones can be published as special supplements, or as separate papers. The Publications Committee also will welcome any suggestions for other story subjects; send your ideas to the Museum office at 110 South Adams, Moscow."

The last item on this list was picked up recently by Curator Keith Petersen for a short paper given before the Pacific Northwest History Conference, and the story of the vinegar plant has been briefed for the forthcoming Tour Guide. Both these subjects deserve much fuller treatment. No. 12 subject was given an interesting but light touch in "Life in Potlatch Was Different" by R. K. Harris in the Winter, 1976, issue of *The Pacific Northwesterner*. The rest of the list remains entirely untouched.

Bashful authors, please step forward!

Moscow's Vinegar Plant

by Jeanette Talbott

Old timers of Moscow will remember that a vinegar plant operated for many years in the north end of town. Little remains of the once large wooden brick-fronted building that housed it. It has been nibbled by fire and man until its modest remains sit well back from Main Street. It is now clad in metal siding, and carries the sign Everett Will Tractor Company. Only on the alley side can you see the wooden construction and the fading dark red color that once was much bolder.

Just when it became a cider and vinegar plant is not known, but Clifford Ott remembers riding to Lewiston in 1914 or 1915 with other boys in a wagon driven by Mr. Veatch, to bring back a load of picked-up apples from the orchards there for use at this plant. Loyal Talbott remembers that it was purchased by a Mr. Gilmore when still in use for that purpose about 1926.

The vinegar making process is described by John Talbott as follows:

Apples came by wagon or truck into the alley between and paralleling Main and Washington streets, usually entered the alley off C Street, and moved into a drive-through runway in the south part of the building. The vehicles drove up a ramp onto a platform where they unloaded. The apples were dumped into a chute which conveyed them to a washer near the north side of the drive. They were then elevated to a bin over the grinder, which was raised high on posts. A little car on small railroad tracks was underneath the grinder and received the apple pulp.

A rack about four feet square was put on the car, and a woolen blanket laid cornerways on the platen received the pulp, which was hand spread. The blanket was quickly folded to the middle, another rack was added, and the process continued until twelve or fifteen alternate racks and pulp layers were stacked up.

The car then was pushed on the track to one of two presses. The juice gushed from the press and was elevated by pumping to 10,000-gallon redwood holding tanks. There were about twenty such tanks in the south bay of the building. Some were charred on the outside from an adjacent fire at a previous time.

In the winter the fermented cider was pumped to the top of the building and allowed to recirculate through trays of coarse curly beachwood shavings, which changed the hard cider to vinegar through an acetification process which continued until all the alcohol changed to acetic acid. The vinegar then was pumped again to tanks in the top of the building, from which it flowed down to barrels and jugs at a level on the north end where barrels could be rolled into box cars of the Inland Electric Railway. The track paralleled the north side of the building, and came across the alley and barely into the adjacent residential lot.

When Zack Riddle worked there, neighbors could take a pitcher over and get it filled with fresh cider to take home.

Apples for this process originally were culls from a packing plant on A Street near where Dumas Seed Company is now, between Jackson and Asbury. Also wind-falls were brought from the Veatch and Whitmore orchards, and others. After the market for Moscow apples no longer justified packing and shipping, the whole apple crop would be shaken from the trees and marketed for vinegar. There was probably little spraying at that time.

One year some of the Talbott children hired out to pick up apples at the Whitmore Orchards at the north end of Orchard Avenue. They were paid by the tied sack. Ernest "Short Arm" Weeks was one of the men who drove the pick-up wagons. Although born without forearms, he was a skilled teamster. In the last two or three years of operation, apple peelings were shipped from Lewiston to supplement the dwindling local apple supplies. The early '30s saw the end of this interesting operation.

After the vinegar plant closed, the building was used for several purposes. At one time it was Craig's Storage, and later it was a soft drink bottling works. An extensive fire in the '50s so damaged the building that it was largely demolished.

Some miscellaneous reminiscences of happenings associated with the vinegar plant include the following:

- Mr. Gilmore, one-time owner, had the misfortune to fall into one of the big holding tanks, and required hospitalization after gulping the vinegar before he could get out.
- It was an easy enough adventure to climb up the gate that closed the runway, and get up on the roof. A young neighborhood boy made the climb, but when he got on the roof and looked down it seemed far too high and he was in a panic. It was a worrisome job to quiet his trembling and restore sufficient confidence to get him down.
- One mishap involved the Talbott's youngest daughter, Louise. The empty box cars into which the cider or vinegar would be loaded stood days at a time on the siding. One such car made a perfect playhouse for a little girl and was just across the alley from the home back yard. It seemed so established that Louise left her dolls and doll furniture there over night. Alas, one morning the box car, including all its furnishings and doll family, had been joined to an outgoing freight train, and was gone forever!

* * *

Fan mail to the *Bulletin* squad has been scarce, though oral notes of appreciation are pleasingly frequent. So we are pleased to print this little bouquet from Bob Walker, once of north Orchard Ave. but now of West Lafayette, Ind.: "I keep meaning to, and perhaps some day I'll get around to thanking Ruth and Francis Nonini for their sustaining work on the Bulletins. I was with Ruth through most of the classes in the schools there, and somewhere in my snapshot files have a picture of our 5th grade class. Anyway, their work is appreciated in my wigwam."

The McConnell Building, National Register Landmark
by Keith Petersen

William McConnell came to Moscow in 1878. Impressed with the future possibilities of this town of less than a hundred residents, he entered into a partnership with J. H. Maguire. In that year they erected a store and stocked it with \$50,000 worth of goods. As Moscow grew, the McConnell-Maguire Store flourished, to the point that by 1880 it was the largest business in town, and by 1891 the partners decided to construct a new building.

The building was not to be an ordinary structure, but was slated to be one of the grandest, most ornate stores in the Northwest. The McConnell-Maguire Store, built on the southeast corner of First and Main streets, was a three story structure stocked with everything from dry goods to an undertaking department. For two years the store thrived and a third member, Frank David, entered the partnership. But the depression of 1893 brought about the downfall of many businesses, the most important local failure being that of the McConnell-Maguire Company. The Company filed papers of insolvency and the business was never reopened. In 1896--the same year McConnell was finishing up his second term as Governor of Idaho--David opened a small store farther down the street. Three years later he moved into the current location of David's Store, easily within sight of the earlier building that had housed the unsuccessful enterprise of which he was a partner.

Meanwhile began a long series of changes in use of the vacated McConnell-Maguire premises. The Motter-Wheeler merchandise store also had begun in Moscow in 1878. With the failure of McConnell-Maguire, Motter-Wheeler moved into the elegantly appointed building on First and Main. By 1897 what had started as one of the smallest merchandise firms in the small town of Moscow had become the largest department store in the State of Idaho. The Motter-Wheeler firm remained in the old McConnell Building until 1913, at which time the store was taken over by one of Moscow's most flamboyant merchants, Nathaniel Williamson. (See "Williamson's

Store," by Frank Williamson & Dick d'Easum, *Quarterly Bulletin*, July 1976).

Williamson's entry into the local merchandising market had begun in 1904 when he purchased a store now known as The Boston at the present location of Cox and Nelson. Williamson was a promoter of the first order, and he soon occupied almost the entire block between Fourth and Fifth streets. But still he did not have enough space, so in 1913 he leased the McConnell Building. His store occupied the entire three floors, and in addition to being well stocked in traditional wares, housed one of Moscow's finest restaurants. On the exterior of the building he hung an electric sign that was almost the full height of the building. The sign said, simply, "Williamson's," and was visible from as far away as the summit of the Viola grade. His was also the first store in northern Idaho to have passenger and freight elevators, a fact which Williamson made much of in his advertising.

But Williamson's promotions of his store were not confined to building improvements. Each Saturday he sent messengers on horseback along the main roads leading to Moscow with flyers proclaiming bargains. Tom Myklebust began his merchandising career as one of those riders. When large shipments of merchandise arrived by rail, Williamson formed parades with the wagons delivering the goods from the depot to the store, complete with bands and banners. While he owned The Boston he sponsored, beginning in 1904, "Williamson's Great Fall Fair." Store merchandise was displayed on sidewalks, and area residents exhibited produce and other items in a large tent on the present site of Dorothy's Fabrics. Finally this extravaganza became known as the Latah County Fair and was moved from the location of Williamson's store.

Williamson's lease of the McConnell Building expired in 1920. For eight years, except for a brief time when a Piggly Wiggly grocery store was on the main level, the grand old building sat vacant. Then, just fifty years ago, in February 1928, a Portland con-

tracting firm announced that remodeling would soon begin to remake the upper floors of the building into apartments. Actual remodeling began on February 16, the day most Moscow businesses were closed for Nathaniel Williamson's funeral.

For the last fifty years the Thatuna Apartments have changed little. The lower portion of the building, however, has housed a variety of firms, from the offices of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration during the 1930s depression to a liquor store to a bowling alley. For the past thirty-two years this level has been the home of Brown's Furniture. Since the mid-1940s the building has been owned by the Louis Strauss family of Colville, Washington.

Gale Cairy has watched over the Thatuna for the Strauss family for over thirty years. While changes have been made, he is proud of the few reminders left which provide faint glimpses of a colorful history. On the north exterior wall can be seen two arched stained-glass windows, and wolf heads along the once-more-ornamental frieze, reminders of the days in 1891 when W. J. McConnell and J. H. Maguire set out to build the finest store in the Pacific Northwest.

On the back of the building can still be read the faded sign proclaiming Williamson's mottos: "Williamson's--Your Store and Ours," and "Idaho's Price Maker and Price Setter." The Williamson vault, on the interior of the building, is still used by the people at Brown's, not for the safe storage of money, but for the storage of lampshades. And the freight elevator that Williamson installed in his store with so much ballyhoo in 1913 now shuttles trusting residents and wary visitors--in groups of no more than four at one time--between the first and third floors of the apartment building.

The William Freehafers have lived in the Thatuna Apartments for thirty years. While Moscow has changed much in those years, the apartments have remained much the same. Rents have always been reasonable, and the Thatuna has traditionally been home for a transient popu-

lation made up largely of students. The Freehaferers are by far the longest residents of the building. Just outside their first floor apartment, the largest in the complex, is the passenger elevator. Upon pushing closed the cage door, the timeworn machine jolts to the third floor and stops four inches shy of the landing. A step up leads to a narrow hallway which eventually winds to a series of windows on the south wall. From here can be seen David's Department Store and many of the other businesses along Main Street. For fifty years apartment residents and visitors have gazed out of these windows onto a changing landscape. And although the interior decor of the hallway gives no hint of past grandeur, what is now known as the Thatuna Building has stood for eighty-seven years, much of the time housing some of the then largest department stores in the Pacific Northwest.

This building on First and Main has provided an interesting vignette in Moscow's history. It is only fitting that it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in March 1978, fifty years almost to the day from the time the first renters moved into the then new Thatuna Apartments. For the Freehaferers and Gale Cairry, placement on the Register will bring no change in daily dealings with the structure. But each will have one more interesting detail to tell about the building which has been a part of their lives for so long.

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Museum Visitations For The Jan-Mar Quarter

January, 45 February, 231 March, 119 Total, 395

Groups:

February	2:	MHS Local History Class
"	17:	Moscow Historical Club
"	17:	Moscow Community School
"	22:	PEO
March	17:	St. Mary's 4th Graders

Historic Homes Tour

The Historical Society will sponsor a Historic Homes Tour in Moscow on April 22. Cost for the tour will be \$3 and \$2 for senior citizens, students, and children. Proceeds will help pay for new audio-visual equipment which the society has purchased to better enable it to expand its outreach program by making knowledge of local history available to schools and organizations throughout the area.

Six homes in Moscow will be visited, all within easy walking distance, and tea will be served throughout the afternoon by the Moscow Historical Club in Epworth Hall of the First United Methodist Church. The tour will last from 1 to 5 p.m., and special guided tours of the Methodist Church will be available at 1:30 and 3:15 p.m. Other than the guided tours at the Church, the tour is self-guiding, and brochures explaining the history and architecture of each building will be available at each stop along the way. In addition, hosts will be available in each home to answer specific questions. Guests may begin anytime during the afternoon that is convenient, at any house.

The homes tour has been in the planning since last fall. Letters were written to other cities that have sponsored such tours, and details were worked out by an energetic committee consisting of: Marilyn Arrington, Robert Baron, Margi Jenks, Joan Muneta, Keith Petersen, and Marilyn Scheldorf. Many thanks go to all committee members, to the Moscow Historical Club for hosting the tea, and to those who volunteers time or refreshments, for the many hours spent in organizing what is hoped will be not only an excellent fundraiser, but also an enjoyable and educational afternoon which will demonstrate that old buildings can provide comfortable and charming dwellings and need not be destroyed, which is, after all, the essence of historic preservation. Special thanks go to the homeowners who graciously consented to open their houses: William and Carolyn Folz, Maynard and Joan Miller, Winfred and Beverly Moorer, Dick and Delores

Sanchez, and Peter and Willie Siems. Thanks also to Rev. Eric Kallis for granting permission to use the Methodist Church and for taking time to lead tours through that historic structure and Moscow landmark.

If this year's tour proves successful, there is a possibility that a Homes Tour will be held each spring, eventually, after the problems are worked out, branching out to other Latah County towns.

Curator's Report

With the purchase of new audio-visual equipment and the success of the recently instituted Historical Series, the Society is increasing its role in attempting to make local history available to groups and individuals throughout the area.

The Board of Trustees in February approved the purchase of a slide projection outfit consisting of two projectors, a dissolve unit and tape recorder/programmer. The equipment arrived in March, and a slide program on Frank Robinson and Psychiana was presented to an overflow crowd at the Mansion on March 30. The new equipment will allow us to make top quality slide presentations, and will also make it possible for various members of the Society to share the responsibility of taking the program to various groups, as the tape programmer provides the dialogue and automatically advances the slides. After putting final touches on the Psychiana program we will begin working on a slide program depicting the history of Potlatch. Hopefully, over the course of the summer, we will be able to develop several different programs, and next fall send announcements to schools and organizations of their availability for programs.

The Historical Series was inaugurated on February 16 when Dr. William Greever spoke to a capacity crowd of approximately 60 people on the "Coeur d'Alene Mines in the 1880s and 1890s." The success of the series continued into March as at the March 30 meeting on

Psychiana people had to be turned away, with the promise of another program at a later date. The success of the series is most encouraging, and we hope we are providing both an entertaining and informative evening once a month for those interested in regional history. A most distinguished speaker will present one lecture in the series this summer, although the exact date of the program is not yet known. Alvin M. Josephy, editor of *American Heritage Magazine* and author of *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, has agreed to participate in the series while on a trip to his home in the Wallowas this summer. Each program in the series will be tape recorded and added to the Society's Oral History Collection. Anyone having ideas for future programs, or desiring more information concerning the series, is invited to call the Museum. See page 15 of this bulletin for upcoming presentations.

In conjunction with the Historic Homes Tour the Society first requested that the City Council allow us to use Moscow's Old Post Office for a tea, at which time participants on the tour would be allowed to view the interior of the building which is presently the center of much discussion and some controversy. The City Council agreed that having an open house of the building was a commendable idea, but felt that the open house should not be limited just to those on the Homes Tour. The Society did not feel that it would be advisable to attempt to serve tea to the entire community, so offered a counter-proposal to the Council which would allow the Society, working jointly with the Fort Russell Neighborhood Organization, to conduct free guided tours through the structure some Saturday in May. It is the feeling of the Society and the Neighborhood Organization that such a tour, in which people are allowed to become familiar with the history of the building and of the various proposals so far made as to its future, will enable the community to make a more educated decision as to the role the building should play in Moscow's future. The City Council has not definitely agreed to the proposal yet, but if they should, we will need volunteers who would like to assist in cleaning the building and would like to serve

as tour guides or security personnel. Anyone interested in this effort is asked to contact the Museum office.

We have had much appreciated assistance from four very competent University museology interns this spring. Julie Broyles, Nick Clark, Ed Hunter, and Bill Newell have assisted in the organizing and cataloging of the Society's photograph collection, in the planning of various exhibits, and in the rejuvenating of the Society's brochure which is handed out to all visitors. Since the Society is understaffed, the assistance of interns and of volunteers is needed to maintain a vital program.

Marilyn Arrington began as a paid staff member in February and is doing an excellent job at keeping the interior of the Mansion clean and presentable. The Board of Trustees is exploring various avenues for the funding of a person to maintain the Mansion grounds over the summer.

The Society's recent endeavors at increasing its research collection has received the assistance of many interested individuals through the donation of valuable gifts. Carol Ryrie Brink donated several of her books that deal with fictionalized local history. Suzanne Dabney Taylor presented several clippings and memorabilia depicting the life of Mary McConnell Borah, and Marilyn Chaney deposited with the Society many postal records from the Viola Post Office. In addition, several people donated books, articles, and manuscripts dealing with local history. The Society's photograph collection grew significantly over the quarter with the donation of 500 glass lantern slides--many being pictures of Latah County and Northern Idaho in the period before 1910--from Dan Leonard, photos of the William Adair family from Jean Hamlin, and of David's Department Store--prior to 1920--from Harry and Clarice Sampson. In addition, the Society made several purchases of books dealing with local history. Again, I would like to ask that those who have local history materials consider donating them to the Society,

as the amount of reference questions we are asked to answer continuously increases, and only through the maintenance of well-stocked library, archive, and photograph collections will we be able to adequately fulfill our role as the county's historical society.

A new exhibit was placed in the Society's exhibit case at the Moscow Library, and two new exhibits were completed in the museum. An exhibit depicting--largely through photographs--some of the more colorful characters of Latah County's past will be ready for public viewing in time for the Homes Tour on April 22. This exhibit will be placed in the upstairs parlor and will make use of specially made panels constructed by the museology interns to divide the room up and allow freedom to change one exhibit in the room without changing the whole room. Work will soon begin on a Potlatch exhibit which will, hopefully, include a brief slide presentation and be available for viewing by early summer.

Coming Events

April 27, 1978, Clifford Ott: Presentation of Historic Moscow slides, Historical Series #3, 8 p.m.

May 25, 1978, Sam Schrager: "Incentives for Migration to Latah County," a presentation making use of the Latah County Historical Society's Oral History Collection, Historical Series #4, 8 p.m.

July 6, 1978 (date tentative), Dr. David H. Stratton, Pacific Northwest History Professor, WSU, and Joseph E. Broyles: The importance of railroads in the development of the Pacific Northwest, with special interest paid to railroads in the development of Moscow, Historical Series #5, 8 p.m.

LATAH COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Pioneer Church Centennial

Genesee Valley Lutheran Church will have its centennial celebration on June 18, 1978. It is the oldest continuing Lutheran Church in Idaho.

A 10 a.m. service will be led by the Rev. Harold Masted, and a 2:30 p.m. service by the Rev. William Bash, both former pastors of the church.

A quartet of former junior choir members, composed of Annalou Luedke Ring, Joyce Danielson Diehl, Rex Eikum, and John Eikum, will sing.

A catered dinner will be served at noon.

Located five miles north of Genesee on the old Genesee-Moscow highway, the church is widely known from Christmas card pictures of it distributed both in the United States and in Scandanavian countries.

Friends from throughout the local area are invited to join in the celebration.