



Potlatch at 80--A Celebration

Special Project Newsletter

August, 1985

The Potlatch at 80 Project

For many years the Latah County Historical Society has actively worked with Potlatch residents to preserve the history of this unique Idaho community. We have preserved and cataloged archival material of the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway Company; photodocumented the entire Potlatch millsite prior to its dismantling; tape recorded over a dozen long-time Potlatch residents as part of our oral history collection; cooperated with the University of Idaho in preserving archival records of the Potlatch Lumber Company; and cooperated with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office in nominating several Potlatch buildings for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

In the late fall of 1984 the Society asked a local advisory committee to help it plan a project to commemorate Potlatch's 80th anniversary in 1986. Local advisory committee members are Florence Anderson, James Dewey, Lee Gale, Nettie Gale, Adeline Howard, Dwight Strong, and Paul Tobin. In addition, the Society was ably supported during its fundraising project by Frederick P. Billings, Communications Consultant for

the Weyerhaeuser Company, Tacoma, Washington, and the Forest History Society, headquartered at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

The first phase of Potlatch at 80 was to raise sufficient money to undertake a high quality project. The fundraising has been completed, and now the Society and local advisory committee are pursuing other aspects of the project, which will include:

- Publishing a full-length, illustrated book on the history of the town and the Potlatch Lumber Company. The book will be completed in the spring of 1987.

- Producing a slide/tape program documenting the history and workings of the Potlatch sawmill. Former employees will narrate a program that will consist of a "walking tour" through the mill. The program will be completed in the spring of 1986, and permanent copies will be distributed in several places, including the Potlatch Public Schools.

- Developing four traveling exhibits that will be shown in north Idaho communities in 1986-87. The exhibits will depict the impact of the lumber company



Potlatch, April 17, 1906. A few people were already living in town. The mill started five months later.

on the development of the towns of Potlatch, Elk River, Deary, and Bovill.

-Gathering oral histories, historic photographs, and written reminiscences and permanently preserving them in the Historical Society's library.

Keith Petersen is serving as project director for the Society and will be the book's author. Petersen received his graduate degree in history from the University of Wisconsin and was Director of the Latah County Historical Society from 1977 to 1981. Since that time he has worked as a historian for many agencies and organizations, including the Idaho State Historical Society, Washington State University, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. He is the author of numerous articles and research guides on the Palouse region, and has been researching Potlatch history since 1979. His research, partially funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and contracts from the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, has taken him to archives throughout the Northwest.

The Society is now working with the Potlatch Lions Club and local individuals helping to make Potlatch's 1986 Community Day celebration the biggest yet. We hope many former residents will come back to town next summer to renew old acquaintances and help celebrate 80 years of Potlatch history. We will publish another Potlatch at 80 newsletter next winter and will keep you informed of the summer's planned activities.

Project Fundraising a Great Success

Over 170 individuals, families, businesses, and organizations contributed to the Potlatch at 80 project, making it a tremendous fundraising success and ensuring that we will be able to undertake several valuable preservation activities. Unless these donors wished not to receive publicity, they are listed elsewhere in this newsletter. We thank them for their generous support.

In addition, the Historical Society has received an \$8,615 grant from the Association for the Humanities in Idaho, the state-based committee of the National Endowment for the Humanities, specifically for the Potlatch at 80 project. The AHI awards grants to non-profit organizations which make humanities projects accessible to the public. In the past six years the Society has received numerous awards from the Association--to produce exhibits, plays, slide programs, and other outreach projects. In recent years organizations like the Latah County Historical Society have had to face budget cuts. At the same time, demands for our services, from historical researchers, genealogists, teachers, college students, businesses, local governments, and others, have increased. One of the ways we have been able to continue meeting the demand for innovative, high quality humanities educational outreach programs is through the continued support of the AHI. We are grateful for its assistance.

Because of the success of our fundraising, the Society will undertake more projects to celebrate Potlatch's 80th anniversary than originally planned. In addition to the Potlatch history book, we will produce traveling exhibits, a slide program, and other activities outlined elsewhere in this newsletter.

Thanks to all of you who have helped!

When Will the Potlatch Book Come Out?

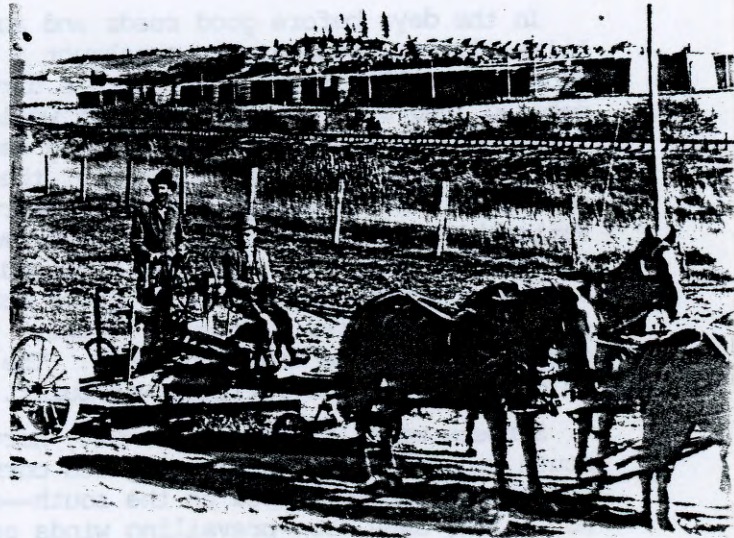
That is the question we are most frequently asked. Book publishing is expensive and time consuming. The Historical Society could not have afforded this project had it not received generous support from so many people. Consequently, it was unable to begin the book project until it was assured fundraising would be successful, making publication possible. Author Keith Petersen is currently writing the manuscript, and the Society is working out details for a joint publication with

the Washington State University Press. We anticipate that the book will be available for distribution in the early spring of 1987, and all project contributors of \$50 or more will receive a special, limited-edition copy. This is a little after the 1986 80th anniversary, but it is about as fast as we can realistically expect the book to be published. However, as outlined elsewhere in this newsletter, we are planning a good number of other projects for the anniversary year--and we think you will agree that the book will be worth waiting for.

Potlatch, Idaho--A Brief History

When the Weyerhaeuser, Laird, Norton, Musser, and other Midwestern lumber families decided to look West in search of more timber at the turn of the century, they moved into Idaho in a big way, organizing several firms in both the northern and southern part of the state. Eventually these groups merged to form Potlatch Forests, Inc. (now Potlatch Corporation) in the north and Boise Cascade in the south. Of all the Idaho ventures, the largest, most ambitious was the Potlatch Lumber Company. "There was an atmosphere of importance and superiority about it, a sort of grandiosity," wrote Frederick Weyerhaeuser's son many years later. "It enjoyed its full share of newspaper publicity." The Potlatch Lumber Company, incorporated in 1903, not only acquired timberlands, it constructed the largest white pine sawmill in the world, built its own shortline railroad, the Washington, Idaho & Montana, and owned and operated a town, one of the largest company towns in the West.

None of this was foreordained. At first, Potlatch's directors thought they would only speculate in timberlands. Then, after deciding to mill lumber, they purchased sawmills in Palouse and Colfax, Washington, and many thought these could cut all the lumber needed. By 1905, though, the directors decided they needed a larger mill to manufacture lumber from the company's vast Latah County-area timber holdings. They purchased land in a brushy flat along the Palouse River, flanked by two wooded hillsides, and laid out Potlatch.



George Adair contributed this photograph to the Latah County Historical Society Library. It shows Pete Clyde and Elmer Travis grading road near Potlatch.

Construction began almost exactly 80 years ago, in the summer of 1905. For the astronomical sum of \$10,000 the company hired W.A. Wilkinson of Minneapolis, grandfather of future University of Oklahoma football coaching legend Bud Wilkinson, to design the huge four band- and one gang-saw mill. It cut its first log in September, 1906, turning out lumber "as though the ground on which it is located had never known anything else than the vibration of the mill's multitude of machinery in restless operation." It was perhaps, for a time, the largest sawmill in the world, belt-driven, steam-operated, an impressive sight, but a plant outdated almost from opening day. The Potlatch mill was constructed during a transitional period between steam and electric powered plants. Within a few years, electric mills could produce lumber more efficiently, and the huge Potlatch mill caused considerable economic difficulty for the company.

In the days before good roads and automobiles, it was necessary to construct a town to house the mill workers. Potlatch's directors debated long over whether Potlatch would be an "open" or "closed" town, but finally decided in favor of a controlled community, the company owning all the buildings. William Deary, Potlatch's general manager, was instrumental in this decision. He believed a closed town created a better work force. Liquor could be prohibited; rowdies evicted. Further, the company would make money on rents. The stockholders agreed, and Potlatch was built.

Streets were laid out east-west, north-south with precisely ninety-degreed corners. The plant managers lived on the south--or Nob--hill, away from prevailing winds so mill smoke would not be a nuisance. Workers resided closer to the plant on the north hill, in houses ranging from three to eight rooms each. The company encouraged matrimony, believing married men were more stable workers. Only families could rent houses. Single men occasionally subletted from families, but most lived in large boarding houses.

Potlatch's residents shopped at the company store--The Merc, one of the biggest in the region, well-stocked with competitive prices. They sent their children to company schools--with a reputation for being the best in Latah County. They were doctored by the company doctor; protected by company-hired policemen; drove on streets and lived in houses company-maintained; and, unless they were Lutheran, attended churches company-built. The Lutherans constructed their own church, but the company owned the property on which it sat. They did not vote in local elections, for there was no mayor or city council. The company performed those duties, too.

It was not a lifestyle suitable for everyone. Lumber workers are traditionally a transient lot, and many people drifted into Potlatch and blew out again almost before anyone knew they had come. But for many it was a fine place. Rents were low; streets tree-lined; the town was attractive and comfortable--the kind of place where you wouldn't mind raising a family. A lot of people stayed for a long time, and there are many in Potlatch today who have fond memories of life in this company town.

Following World War II, labor expenses increased dramatically, and the cost of maintaining a townsite work crew ate into the company's rental profits to the point where it was faced with either drastically raising rents, letting the community deteriorate, or getting out of the company town business. It opted for the latter. In the early 1950s the company announced it was selling all houses and business buildings, with first options going to current renters. Nearly all the buildings were sold by 1954.

In January, 1906, the E.J. Davis family moved into Potlatch. "My wife is here and we are the first to occupy a house in the new town site of Potlatch," Davis wrote. "We were chivareed here for the first time. I did not set out the wine for this is a temperance town, but the boys took cigars and the ladies candy." In 1986 Potlatch will be 80 years old. It has changed from the vigorous sawmilling town of 2,000 in 1910. Some of the changes have been good, some perhaps not so. Next year the town's residents and neighbors will have an opportunity to reflect upon all these changes and plan for the future as they celebrate the 80th anniversary of one of the Northwest's most unique communities.

Do You Have Photographs of Potlatch?

If you have photographs, diaries, letters, written reminiscences, business ledgers, or other materials relating to the town of Potlatch, we would like to hear from you. The Historical Society wants to greatly expand the Potlatch collections in its research library. If you have photos or other materials relating to the town, we would like to borrow them for a short period, make copies, and return the originals to you. The copies will then be permanently preserved for future generations.

Many people think the items they have are not historically significant. Yet the most common materials often have the most value. A snapshot of a family at the dining room table not only shows



Elmer Coffman, Almeda Cone, Felix Stapleton and Eileen Puckett, interior of Stapleton Motors showroom, c. 1939. Photo contributed by F.J. Stapleton.

individuals who lived in Potlatch, but details house interiors--something we have very few photographs of. Photos of groups playing, of houses, street scenes, interiors and exteriors of businesses, boarding houses, barns, the mill, people at work--all of these are significant.

Letters written from Potlatch people to relatives or friends can depict everyday life in the town, as can a diary. Ledgers help show the types of supplies people purchased at various times. Your written reminiscences are also valuable. Why not take a little time to jot down your memories of Potlatch. You might focus on a person you knew, an event like a ball game or July 4th picnic, work at the mill, school days, or any of a wide variety of other topics.

We want to preserve as much Potlatch history as possible. Give us a call at (208)882-1004, or drop us a note at 110 S. Adams, Moscow, ID. 83843. We will be happy to talk to you about your photos and other materials.

Since the Potlatch at 80 project began in late 1984 we have received research materials from the following people. We thank them for their valuable donations.

George Adair: 10 photographs

Frederick P. Billings: Clippings and other materials relating to the C.L. Billings family

Raymond Cameron: Reminiscences of a 1929 Christmas in Potlatch

Richard King: 2 photographs

Carol Lemke: Biographical information on William Lemke, former superintendant of operations for the W.I. & M. Railway

Francis Nonini: 3 photographs

Alta O'Connell: Typewritten reminiscences entitled "20 Years in Potlatch, 1931-1951," and 4 photographs

F.J. Stapleton: 6 photographs

J.L. Terteling: Typewritten manuscript on the history of the Terteling Company, including its beginnings in Potlatch

The Latah County Historical Society

The Latah County Historical Society was established in 1968 by a group of people dedicated to preserving Latah County's heritage. In 1971 the Society opened the McConnell Mansion in Moscow, the 1886 Victorian home of Idaho's Governor William McConnell. The Mansion features period rooms and changing exhibits on county history. The Society has since grown to over 550 members and is one of the most active in the Pacific Northwest. It is recognized nationally as a leader among small historical societies.

The Society has published nearly 20 books dealing with regional topics and also produces Latah Legacy, its quarterly journal devoted to Latah County history. In the past few years, the Legacy has published such articles as "Life in a Company Town: Potlatch, Idaho;" "Farewell to the Potlatch Mill;" "Laird Park;" "The Logging Camps of Potlatch;" and "The 1911 Logging Methods of the Potlatch Lumber Company." The Society has also conducted one of the largest oral history projects in the Northwest and maintains

an outstanding research library. The Society is governed by a 17-member volunteer Board of Trustees, and has a three-person professional staff.

All Society members receive four free Latah Legacies each year, as well as free Society newsletters and a 20 percent discount on all Society publications. Joining the Society not only helps preserve regional history, but helps you keep in touch with Latah County. If you are not already a member, please take a few minutes to complete and return the membership coupon which is attached to this newsletter. You will be assisting the Society to continue doing projects like Potlatch at 80.

Project Donors--Thanks to All

Over 170 individuals, families, businesses, and organizations contributed to the Potlatch at 80 project. Some people asked that we not publicize their donation. We thank them anyway, and we are happy to adhere to their request. We are also very pleased to list the following donors who have made the Potlatch at 80 project possible. Their interest in preserving the history of Potlatch is greatly appreciated.

All of the donors--unless they requested no publicity--will be listed in the front of the Potlatch history book. If you are a project contributor, PLEASE FIND YOUR NAME AND MAKE SURE IT IS SPELLED ACCURATELY AND IS LISTED AS YOU WOULD LIKE IT IN THE BOOK. If you wish to make a change, please write "Potlatch at 80," c/o Latah County Historical Society, 110 S. Adams, Moscow, ID., 83843.

BENEFACTORS

George Frederick Jewett, Jr. Family (San Francisco)

PATRONS

Maryanne Decker Henske, in memory of Charlotte Laird Decker (Greens Farm, CT.)

Setsuo Matsura, in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Roderick Hearn (Farmington Hills, MI.)

Jeannette Petersen, in memory of Warren S. and Saloma Benner (LaCenter, WA.)

Stanley Shepard (Moscow)
Mr. and Mrs. Luke Williams (Spokane)

SPONSORS

Bennett Lumber Products (Princeton)
Frances Laird Osgood, in memory of Laird Bell (Wilmette, IL.)

Kathleen Peck Probasco (Moscow)

SUPPORTERS

Dagny E. Alsterlund, in memory of Alfred E. and Eugenia E. Alsterlund, and Alfred I. Alsterlund (Spokane)

Mr. and Mrs. L.J. Ashbaugh (Moscow)
Norris and Nancy Biggerstaff (Spokane)
Patricia Born, in memory of Dr. Nereus M. Cook (Mt. Vernon, WA.)

Norton Clapp (Seattle)
Raymond H. Compton, in memory of Edward T. Compton (Santruse, PR.)

Helen de Freitas, in memory of Laird Bell (London)

Dr. Frank C. Gibson, Jr., in memory of Dr. Frank Gibson, Sr. (Seattle)

Catherine Gleave and Inez Gleave Rich, in memory of Harry L.M. and Nellie Gleave (San Diego)

William S. and Janet Groff Greever (Moscow)

Roger Guernsey, in memory of Evon and Viola Guernsey (Garden Valley, ID.)

Cora Knott (Moscow)
Alice and Walter Mallory (Lewiston)
Sophia Marineau, in memory of William T. Marineau (Moscow)

Jean M. Monnett (Moscow)
Judy and Ralph Nielsen (Moscow)
H. Robert and Lillian Otness (Moscow)
Roland W. Portman (Spokane)

Carol and Malcolm Renfrew, in memory of Earl E. Renfrew (Moscow)

Mr. and Mrs. Edgar E. Renfrew, in memory of Robert James (Rob) Morris (Lock Haven, PA.)

Felix L. and Jerry Stapleton (San Jose)
Allen and Betsy Strong, in memory of Arthur and Alice Strong (Citrus Heights, CA.)

Gary E. Strong Family, in honor of Cleora and Dwight Strong (Carmichael, CA.)

Nellie E. Trotter, in memory of William Trotter, Sr., and Luther Trotter (Potlatch)

Washington Water Power Co. (Spokane)

CONTRIBUTORS

Terry Abraham (Potlatch)
Patrick and Elsa Agnew, in memory of
Erick and Ida Matson, and William and
Margaret Deary (Riverside, CA.)
Richard A. Anderson, in memory of William
and Hilda Anderson, and Andrew and Carrie
Lundquist (Eugene)
Robert Anderson, in memory of Art and
Florence Anderson (Beaverton, OR.)
Sherrel and Dorothy Anderson (Potlatch)
Kenneth Andrew, in memory of Signa H.
and Shelton E. Andrew (Hayden Lake, ID.)
John D. Armstrong, in memory of John
David Morrissey (El Segundo, CA.)
Alexia Asplund, in memory of Elof Asplund
(Potlatch)
Glen E. Atkison (Potlatch)
Beulah J. Baker, in memory of G. Orien
Baker (Moscow)
Win Baker, in memory of G.C. Baker
(Wenatchee, WA.)
William and Dorothy Barnes (Moscow)
Frances L. Bellmont (Seattle)
Donna Bray (Moscow)
Nathalie Bell Brown, in memory of
Laird Bell (Tacoma)
Eugene Burden, in memory of Job, Levi,
and Emery Burden (Portland)
Earl E. Button (Hammond, IN.)
David and Kendria Cada, in memory of Mr.
and Mrs. Bernie Hansen (Potlatch)
Joe and Dorothy Cada, in memory of Mr.
and Mrs. Joseph G. Cada, Sr. (Potlatch)
Raymond R. Cameron (Tacoma)
Martin and Kelly Caturia (Potlatch)
Mel and Louise Chandler, in memory of
Ethel and Wesley Chandler (Potlatch)
Louis E. Chappell (Potlatch)
Florence L. Cline (Moscow)
Delfred Cone, in memory of John and
Mattie Cone (Potlatch)
Josephine Thompson Cox, in memory of Dr.
Joseph W. Thompson (Sacramento)
Wilmer and Cynthia Cox (Moscow)
Dell R. David (Clarkston)
James and Helen Dewey (Princeton)
Dewey M. Dixon (Potlatch)
Mrs. Harley Drollinger (Yakima, WA.)
Dick and Sharon Dudley (Potlatch)

Clifford J. French (Potlatch)
Ruth E. Frick (Coeur d'Alene)
Carl and Ingrid Fynboe (Fox Island, WA.)
Lee and Nettie Gale, in memory of
Homer and Rhoda Peterson Canfield (Potlatch)
Edward Gambetty, in memory of Victoria
and George Gambetty (Spokane)
Mrs. Mark Gleason, in memory of Mr.
and Mrs. Arthur G. Burch (Pablo, MT.)
Amber Gleave, in memory of Gordon
Gleave (St. Louis)
Fred R. Gleave, in memory of Mr. and Mrs.
H.L.M. Gleave (Spokane)
Jack M. Gruber (Lewiston)
Kathleen Hardcastle, Attorney at Law
(Potlatch)
Flora G. Harris, in memory of John
Lienhard (Potlatch)
Mr. and Mrs. Bill Hash, in memory of
Glee Depee (Princeton)
Philip Hearn, in memory of Mr. and Mrs.
W.E. Hearn (Alexandria, VA.)
Conrad and Inger Hermsted, in memory
of Erick and Ida Matson (Renton, WA.)
Hiawatha Apartments (Potlatch)
Adeline B. Howard, in memory of William
M., Emma Lienhard, and Allison Alfred
Boller (Potlatch)
Alfred R. Howard, in memory of William
T. and Emaline Johnson Howard (Potlatch)
Mr. and Mrs. John A. Howard (Potlatch)
Julian G. Humiston, in memory of Walter
and Mollie Humiston (Deerfield Beach, FL.)
Laverna L. Huston, in memory of Ernest
Gunderson (Port Orchard, WA.)
Idaho First National Bank (Potlatch)
Irvin and Janice Johnson (Moscow)
Richard and Joann Jones (Viola)
Harold and Ruth King (Moscow)
Richard N. King, in memory of Wilson
and Laura King (Spokane)
Wendell G. Krasselt (Tualatin, OR.)
Karl H. Krause (Olympia, WA.)
Calvin and Elizabeth Kreid (Potlatch)
Virgil and Elizabeth Krous, in memory
of George and Vickie Gambetty (Spokane)
Rick and Kelly Largent (Potlatch)
Marguerite W. Laughlin (Moscow)
Charles W. Leinbach, in memory of Myra
and Walter J. Gamble (Santa Monica)
Carol Lemke, in memory of William R.
(Bill) Lemke (Lewiston)

Phyllis and Duane LeTourneau (Moscow)
Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Lyle (Moscow)
Jack McBride (Potlatch)
Thelma McCrory, in memory of Luther L.,
Orville L., and Louella Miller Vassar (Palouse)
William Ernest McGee (Metaline Falls, WA.)
Bessie McKinney, in memory of Dewey
McKinney (Potlatch)
Patty O. McLaughlin, in memory of James J.
O'Connell (Mountain Home, ID.)
Edwin B. Mains (Oceano, CA.)
Moscow Auto Services (Moscow)
Charles L. Mundy, in memory of Hazel Mae
Colvin (Sacramento)
Northwest Woodworks and Construction (Viola)
Henry Nygaard, in memory of Martin and
Corinne Paroz Nygaard (Moscow)
Carol Oberbillig, in memory of Albert F.
Hamburg (Boise)
Mr. and Mrs. Bernard L. Odelin, in memory
of Mary E. Ackerman (Potlatch)
Loyal J. Oien, in memory of Mr. and Mrs.
Peter O. Oien (Brinnon, WA.)
Mr. and Mrs. Earl J. Olsen, in memory of
the Harry Gleave Family (Moscow)
Daisy and Amie Paroz, in memory of Gilbert
Paroz (Potlatch)
Evelyn Pelton, in memory of Homer Pelton
(Potlatch)
Rollo P. Perkins (Princeton)
Jack K. Petersen (LaCenter, WA.)
Keith Petersen and Mary E. Reed, in memory
of John C. and Ida Frick Gleason (Pullman)
Agnes C. Peterson (Moscow)
The Children of Homer L. Peterson, in
memory of Homer L. Peterson
Pipeline Distributing (Potlatch)
Plummer and Wagner (Potlatch)
Potlatch Empire Foods (Potlatch)
Potlatch Lions Club (Potlatch)
Gretchen Potter (Moscow)
Myrtle E. Powlison (Longview, WA.)
Mr. and Mrs. Barry Rauch (Potlatch)
Bessie I. Roe, in memory of Virgil P.
Roe (Potlatch)
Malcolm E. Rossman (Nampa, ID.)
Philip and Leona Sawyer (Potlatch)
Marie and D.F. Scharnhorst (Genesee)
Robert R. Schnurr, in memory of Fred and
Gladys Schnurr (Coeur d'Alene)
O.V. Smiset, in memory of Nels Smiset
(Sunnyside, WA.)

Dr. Victor C. Smith, in memory of Dottie
Murray Smith (Monmouth, OR.)
Kemet and Mariel Spence (Potlatch)
Douglas K. and Carol Strong (Pullman)
Dwight and Cleora Strong (Moscow)
Howard I. and Mary Newton Strong (Pullman)
Charles G. Talbott, Jr., in memory of
the C.G. Talbott Family (John Day, OR.)
Taylor Insurance Agency (Pullman)
Eugene and Johan C. Thompson (Moscow)
Louise Trail, in memory of Josephine
Alexander (Moscow)
Cloyd L. Tuttle, in memory of Harold
"Snake River Red" Rounds (Winston Salem, NC.)
Eddie and Lorretta Vowels (Princeton)
Thomas Rex Walenta, in memory of Carol
Florence Walenta (Grangeville, ID.)
Calvin and Kathleen Warnick (Moscow)
White Pine Drug (Potlatch)
Herbert L. Wickstrand (Bellvue, WA.)
Charles F. Woods (Lewiston)
Wilbur W. Wright (Potlatch)
Hank and Helen Zimet, in memory of
W.J. Gamble (Moscow)

We also want to thank the following:

Edward Arbuckle and Marjorie Arbuckle
Perri (Lewiston)
Thomas Burg (Merrill, WI.)
Marjorie L. Chorlton (Portland)
Russell L. Chrysler (Moscow)
Lambert C. and Hazel Erickson (Moscow)
Helen Johnstone (Modesto, CA.)
Jack Madison (Tillamook, OR.)
Jean Cummings Rudolph (Moscow)