



WHITMAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 50, No. 5 – October 2023

WCHS Annual Meeting Slated for October 8

Whitman County Historical Society's Annual Meeting will be held at the Steptoe School on Sunday, October 8. Tours will begin at 2:00 PM, followed by a program on early schools and teachers in Whitman County by **Kathy Meyer** (Pullman) at 3:00. A short business meeting will follow the program.

Note that the Steptoe School, which opened in 1909, is the oldest school in continuous use in Washington. Unlike most older schools in the state, it has been carefully maintained but not remuddled. The photo above was taken in 1923, after an addition was built that doubled the size of the school.



3rd Annual Depot Days a Success!

Several hundred people attended Depot Days during Pullman's annual Lentil Festival, August 18 and 19. The highlight of Depot Days—whose theme was "Tractors, Grains, and Trains"—included vintage



tractors from the collections of

members of the Lewis-Clark Antique Power Club, who were present to talk about their tractors and answer visitors' questions. Pictured above, in a photo by **Jamie Whitman**, are **Jim Allen**, **Jack Fulfs**, **Everett Martin**, and **Gary Simpson** (all Pullman).

In addition, the Phoenix Conservancy and the United States Department of Agriculture manned exhibit tables, and **Maddie Farnsworth** (Pullman) again exhibited and demonstrated her collection of train horns. Children could play with the Depot's large collection of Thomas the Train railroad tracks and traincars. Inside was an array of baked goods for tasting, as well free recipe cards for each item, all of which featured different kinds of grains grown on the Palouse.

A number of energetic young Depot volunteers from the WSU History Department also marched in the Lentil Festival Parade on Saturday morning. At right, **Milo Flint** is pushing a baggage cart.



“Fallen Cougars” Program at the Depot on November 9

“Fallen Cougars” will once again be the subject of the annual Veterans’ Day program at the Pullman Depot Freight Room. Starting at 7:00 PM, several graduate and undergraduate history majors working with the Washington State University World War II Commemoration Project will each speak on a different man who lost his life during the war—each of whom had a connection to Washington State College as a student, faculty member, or alumnus.

According to project director **Raymond Sun** (Albion) “By presenting the photos and life stories of the generation of Cougars who died in the fight against fascism and militarism, the project aims to restore the humanity and the spirit of these approximately 250 WSC war dead, transforming them from names on a plaque to young men to whom contemporary Cougars and the public can readily relate. It is thus intended to serve both as a scholarly resource and as a means to advance public understanding and appreciation for the service and legacy of these former Cougars in this defining moment of American and world history.” For more information on the project, see the WSU Fallen Cougars Project on You Tube and the 2020 winter edition of the *Washington State Magazine*.



Grant for St. Elmo’s!

by Evan Ellis

The city of Palouse has received a state grant to examine the possible renovation of the old St. Elmo hotel building downtown. The \$50,000 grant is from the Washington State Community Economic Revitalization Board. Local residents have raised an additional \$12,000.



Haunted Palouse 2023 Cancelled

This year's Haunted Palouse – some of which usually takes place at the WCHS's Boomerang Print Museum in the city of Palouse – has been cancelled. Citing a lack of leadership, among other things, the Haunted Palouse planning team has reluctantly decided that it does not have enough volunteers to staff its annual Haunted Main Street and Zombie Trail events. Coordinator **Jamie Gaber** (Palouse) says that Haunted Palouse will return in 2024, and that the group plans to work on strengthening its numbers in the interim. If you are interested in helping with this worthwhile effort – which raises money for various Palouse groups, sign up at <https://airtable.com/appb4wJU62CF5Qtk2/shrPeURQWAcMZxSKn>

Number of Jones Schoolhouse Visitors Up from Last Year

The newly painted Jones Schoolhouse was visited by a grand total of 1,097 fair-goers during the 2023 Palouse Empire Fair, which ran from September 7 to 10. This was the second highest number of visitors since record-keeping began at the schoolhouse in 2016. The record—1,247—belongs to 2018.



Mini lessons for ten third-grade classes took place on Thursday, which is “Third-Grade Day at the Fair” every year. All but two classes (Palouse and



Endicott) were from Pullman schools. Tours of the schoolhouse were available to fair-goers in general after school ended at 2:00, as well as all day Friday and Saturday, and Sunday afternoon. Volunteers and teachers included **Krista Boyd** (Colfax), **Theresa and Mike Dale**, and **Jill Gfeller** (all of Thornton), **Valoree Gregory** (Steptoe), and **Kathy Meyer, Scott Lyle**, and **Jamie and Bill Whitman** (all of Pullman).

The Blacksmith Shop at the Fair again featured vintage farm tools and machinery, which were identified on placards for those wishing to take self-guided tours.

Correction: Our apologies to **Denise Mahnkey**, whose last name was spelled incorrectly in the last newsletter.

Update and Recap: The Pullman Depot Heritage Center

by Debbie Sherman

The Whitman County Historical Society began its largest endeavor in its 51-year history when it purchased Pullman's Northern Pacific Railroad Depot early in 2018. Five and a half years later, much progress has been made on restoring the building, which was built in 1917.

Instrumental in the Depot's acquisition were board members **Jon Anderson, Ed Garretson** and then President **Greg Partch**. According to

treasurer Anderson, the trio learned from a local realtor that the owner, **Meghan Antoni**, had put the property up for sale following the death of her father, **Dan Antoni**.



The trio toured the building and, as Garretson noted, "There was a compelling reason to buy it as something that needed to be saved in Pullman, not to be demolished and the property used for a five-story housing building. It is a beautiful structure in the heart of downtown. It turns you to the river, not your back to the river as part of the downtown core."

The trio deemed that the original asking price of \$775,000 was too high for purchase by WCHS; however, they immediately recognized its historic importance for both Pullman and Whitman County. Following a meeting with Antoni, the three negotiated the asking price down to \$300,000. An anonymous individual loaned WCHS \$100,000 toward the purchase price, with the remainder of \$200,000 borrowed from a local bank. Board approval came in March of 2018.

Linda Hackbarth and **Kathy Meyer** served as original co-chairs, bringing more than fifty like-minded volunteers together to plan for the future restoration. Partch states, "The Depot was a critical and perfect means to establish a connection with the Whitman County Historical Society and Pullman." Nearly everything and everyone came to Pullman by rail, and Partch noted its importance to the county's commerce, businesses, and Washington State University, whose students passed through the Northern Pacific Depot by the thousands every semester to attend classes (see photo on next page). Former Pullman businessman **Tom Neill**, a third-generation owner of Neill Motors, recalled as a young Boy watching cars being delivered to Pullman via rail.



Highlights of the past five years include repayment of the purchase loans, the removal of two train cars resting against the building, listing on the National Registry of Historic Places, and receipt of two Washington State Heritage Grants (which assisted in funding the replacement of some foundation blocks and repointing of the building's brick façade).

After volunteers cleaning the basement and attic discovered some of the original roof tiles that graced the building in 1917, further investigation

revealed that their manufacturer is still in business. Following guidelines of the state grants, funds were raised to replace the existing metal roof with those exact tiles, which were recently installed. Future restoration efforts will include original door and window casement restoration, electrical service upgrades, and bringing restrooms into compliance with ADA requirements while maintaining many of the original fixtures (such as an elaborate double porcelain urinal in the men's room!).

Meanwhile, the Depot's many busy volunteers have welcomed thousands of visitors. Numerous exhibits have been created, along with Depot Days (held in conjunction with Pullman's Lentil Festival), monthly programs (BookTalks and Palouse People presentations), two Vintage Quilt Shows, an annual holiday Rail Car Bazaar, and the hosting of numerous community meetings.

If you haven't visited the Depot yet, come on down on Saturdays from 1-4! Learn how railroads changed Whitman county, its economy, and made a lasting impact on

students attending Washington State University from the early 1920s to mid-1960. As Anderson states, "The Depot was all encompassing in touching the lives of everyone in Whitman County."

Most of all, we'd like to thank our generous donors whose contributions are making this vision come alive.



Did you know? According to the two editors who launched it – Charles Hopkins and Lucien Kellogg – the *Palouse Gazette* was the earliest newspaper “east of the Cascades and north of the Snake River.” The Republican-leaning weekly was first published on September 29, 1877. It was later called the *Colfax Gazette* and is now known as the *Whitman County Gazette*.



Debbie Sherman is co-editor of this newsletter and chairman of the Pullman Depot Fund Raising Committee. She also serves on the Depot Steering Committee and its Education and Events Committee. She has been volunteering at the Depot since its first organizational meeting.



In the past, Debbie served as the executive director for United Way of Pullman for twelve and a half years. Working to represent eighteen non-profit human service agencies, she was responsible for fundraising, public-speaking presentations, donor-base management, financial recordkeeping, and graphic design. She was also a small business owner for more than fifteen years. She studied journalism in college and has worked as a reporter and editor for numerous publications.

When asked why she devotes so much of her time to WCHS, she said, “I love old buildings; and because it has so much history and personality, I love the Depot.” She also hinted that she wished her name hadn’t been pulled out of the jar of volunteer names for this month’s spotlight!

Please Renew Your Membership

If you haven’t done so already, please take a minute or two to respond to the membership renewal request you may have recently received in the mail (batches are sent to different members every month). Membership would also make a great birthday or Christmas gift! The form can be found below, or you can download it from the WCHS website (whitmancountyhistoricalsociety.org). Membership fees are particularly crucial for the publication of the *Bunchgrass Historian*. Thank you!

Did you know? The highest elevation (4009 feet) in Whitman County is the summit of Tekoa Mountain, near the city of Tekoa – not Steptoe Butte (3612 feet) or Kamiak Butte (3641 feet). There is another Tekoa Mountain in Massachusetts, but it is only 1121 feet tall.

2023 Calendar

October 8	WCHS Annual Meeting, Steptoe School
October 19 OR 26	BookTalk: <i>The Ida Lou Anderson House</i> . Pullman Depot Freight Room
November 9	“Fallen Cougars,” a Palouse People presentation at the Pullman Depot
November 15	WCHS Board Meeting, Pullman Depot Freight Room
December 2	Pullman Festival of Lights (Santa Comes to Pullman via the Depot)
December 2	Colfax Winter Fest (Holiday Open House at the Perkins House)
December 2, 9, 16	Holiday Train Car Bazaar at the Pullman Depot
December 20	WCHS Board Meeting, Zoom

MEMBERSHIP: Become a part of the exciting future of Whitman County, or share its history with a friend or relative! Join, renew your membership, or give a gift membership.

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