

Perkins House: Foundation Repairs Completed as Society Approaches 50 Years

Last summer, repairs to the Perkins House foundation and exterior masonry were completed by Legacy Contractors. Laid in 1884, the original foundation consisted of little more than the brickwork that runs along the bottom of the external walls, the quarried stone this perimeter is laid upon, and several vertical, wooden supports in the basement that prop up the first floor and which appear to have been stood upon nothing but dirt. Over the past 138 years of soil erosion, animal activity, and house itself settling, several of the wooden supports on the southern side had sunk significantly into the earth and had thus fallen more than an inch away from the floor as they were supposed to be holding up.

These gaps had obviously been growing for decades. When Nancy Rothwell and Val Gregory crawled underneath the building with an engineer last summer, they found that previous owners had just been sticking pieces of rock and wood in the gaps so that the floor there still rested upon the supports. But this was obviously only a temporary solution, and since the Society purchased the house fifty

years ago, the practice hadn't been kept up anyway. So the supports fell, and the gaps increased—down there in the darkness of the crawlspace, unbeknownst to anyone.



Because it was well made, and because it still stood firmly upon the brick foundation of the external walls, the floor did not collapse even though the supports that propped it up were no longer holding it. But the weight of the house was now laid unevenly upon the foundation, and by last year the floor was so off-level that many of the doors and windows no longer opened. The house's condition was steadily deteriorating, and according to engineers, it would not be long before its longevity would be in jeopardy.

To save it, Legacy jacked up the floor so that it was reasonably straight (Nancy says it will never be perfectly level, as jacking the floor up that far would cause the walls of the house to crack. She says it would cause more damage than it would be worth). That done, they laid large concrete pads for the supports to stand upon, and also poured a



a four-foot concrete retaining wall that rises up to meet the supports under one of the main crossbeams on the southern side. This should create a profoundly more sturdy foothold where once there was only some wood and the notoriously mobile soil of a town built in a river bed. Finally, they replaced the broken supports, and of course mended the exterior masonry where it had crumbled. The cost was \$80,000.

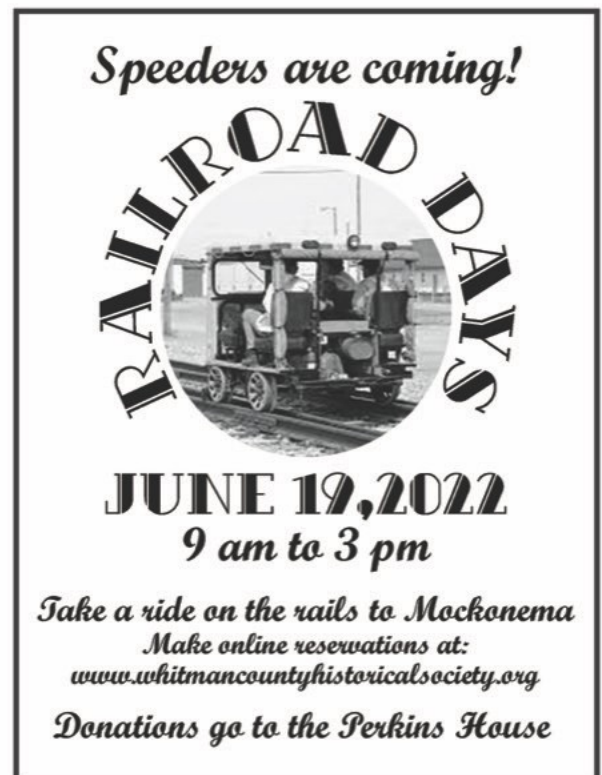
Once more, then, the Society's first purchase has been saved. Sure-footed, and the pandemic over, it is back at work uniting the historically minded from all over Whitman County.

You are hopefully aware that after two years of hiatus, the Perkins House will again be hosting its annual fundraiser this summer. However—in a break from a decades-long tradition—the fundraiser will not be an ice cream social. Due to economic shifts, the ice cream social has become less and less profitable for the Perkins House. The last time it was held, it actually lost money.

Instead, this Father's Day (June 19th), we will be gathering at the Perkins House for Railroad Days—an adventurous excursion where groups will be taken in speeder cars along the historic railway from Colfax to Mackonema: a half-hour ride each way, and an excellent tour of some of our area's most beautiful vistas. Fundraising prospects look well for the event. All 92 speeder tickets—costing \$30 each—sold out in a few days. A recent visitor to the house mentioned that he himself helped to maintain a historical building in his area, and that they too used to raise funds by offering speeder car rides. According to this gentleman, the event was always impressively productive, and a great help in their efforts to maintain their historical landmark.

Please join the volunteers at the Perkins House that day for live music, pulled pork sandwiches from the Top Notch restaurant, vintage "selfie stations," and of course a vintage fashion show. Donation boxes will be available, and volunteers appreciate your support. All donations will go directly to repairs, upkeep, and future-proofing of the house and property.

According to Nancy Rothwell this event will help to make back some of the money just spent on repairing the foundation. It will also help fund several upcoming projects, including the installation of a drainage field in the southern lawn this summer. This project will consist of burying a moisture-wicking fabric in the lawn that will draw water away from the foundation, depositing it in underground holding pans that will then distribute the moisture evenly into the soil, downhill from the house. This will hopefully prevent any



further dry rot—an ailment that has plagued both the house and the adjacent cabin throughout their history.

Another current project is installing high-speed internet in the house. Reportedly, the internet at the Perkins House is extremely weak and unreliable. This presents many issues, given that the house acts as a headquarters for the Society itself. It appears that the cost of running an underground wire to the house will be over \$1000. Cheaper options are being explored before any action is taken, but the board did approve this budget at its April meeting so that it could be used if needed. Nancy says that as soon as the internet is working, she wants to begin seriously marketing the house as a wedding venue. She expects this would be a productive source of income for the property, but without reliable internet the house would not be attractive to interested couples. Nancy tells me that her long-term goals for the house include repairing what's left of the wood rot, and seeing the entire house repainted.

Finally, you may be aware that this July will be the 50th anniversary of the Whitman County Historical Society. As the Perkins House was the impetus for the Society forming in 1972, it is hard to look at the white scarring in its brickwork and the sturdy concrete in its basement and not think about the last half-century of dedication and love that have brought it—and now several more endangered pieces of our history—back from the brink of total destruction.



According to records, the Perkins House was finally purchased in April of 1973. It so happens that this writer's first visit to the place was this April, after spring's first false starts had passed, and the last of the snow finally melted in the new warmth. I happen to know, then, that in April the Perkins House shines resplendent in the yellow light of spring. That it stands with a posture of dignity atop its hill of rich green, on an unassuming street, in the middle of the town it built. That was the same day that the Columbia Basin Chapter of the Model A Ford Club of America came to tour the house in their shining vintage cars, and I got to see the once dying place filled with curious history-lovers, excited to learn its storied passed.



49 years ago, did the same light shine upon its filthy, peeling paint, as the first workers walked toward it, up the lawn? How often did nascent Society doubt the expensive endeavor of saving a sinking, water damaged titan whose very walls were cracking and whose wallpaper itself had long since rotted off the wood? And yet through their volunteerism, and through their loving presence in this house, how brilliantly it has come back into health. How good to know that by the same means it might just stand for centuries more.

If you're looking for more ways to support the Perkins House, it still offers tours on Saturdays and Sundays from 10-2.

If you or your organization want to set up a private tour, contact Nancy at perkinscoordinator2@gmail.com

St. Ignatius: Rapid Progress and New Discoveries

Having served Whitman County as its exclusive hospital for almost 100 years, St. Ignatius and its spectral residents are still breathing life into the Colfax community. Indeed, strange as it is to say, they are now healing the body of the building itself.

According to Val Gregory—who took myself and my nephew Darius on a nighttime tour of the hospital this April—the building has brought over 18,000 daring visitors to Colfax in its seven years of operation as a paranormal hot spot. Having started its financial journey with an Indiegogo campaign seeking to make \$50,000 for initial repairs, Val says the hospital's earnings as a tourist destination have blown far passed that initial goal, and currently amount to about \$400,000. While the project of stabilizing and refurbishing the building will eventually cost millions, this spritely progress obviously shows great promise.

Currently, repairs are focused on the floors of the first four stories. Due to a major leak in the roof which allowed rain and snow to weep into the building during its decades of neglect, initial inspections uncovered an enormous wound of rot and water damage piercing straight down through the heart of the building. While the structure itself has remained solid, the material of the floors in this area—and probably the interior of the walls—was badly rotted and uneven.

In the passed weeks, rapid progress has been made. The floors have been jacked up from beneath and releveled. Currently, they are braced upon temporary retaining walls while repairs are finished. The rotted material of the floors has been cut away completely, finally

revealing the sheer magnitude of the damage: standing beneath the gaping hole that is now left, you are small, gazing into vast towers shadow reaching all the way up to the roof.

However, this operation has also revealed a reason to hope. As it turns out, hidden within the floors of the hospital, there is a system of large cross beams that hold the exterior walls together and firmly brace the entire structure to itself. Apparently, the beams form a kind of super-strong lattice: on one floor they run east-to-west, and on the next up they run north-to-south. This explains a lot about how the hospital has held up so well despite so much harm, and suggests that it will remain solid for untold time yet. Val says that when she and Austin Storm (who currently owns and manages the property with his wife Laura) stood beneath these unburied beams, staring up at them, laughing, they decided together that—if they



kept working—St. Ignatius was going to be just fine.

Once the floors have been repaired, workers will move on to replacing the roof, which has fallen in on itself on one side and is still leaking water into St. Ignatius. Right now the leak is being diverted outside by a system of plastic sheeting, but there's only so much that can be done. It is believed, given the building's impressive support structure, that once the roof is removed and the top is resealed with a new one—the interior at last protected from the elements, for the first time in twenty years—the building can finally be considered to have been saved: no longer in danger of deteriorating passed our ability to repair it.

A similar but smaller project is underway for the windows. Most of them were broken out, of course, which further exposed the interior to the elements and let in wild animals. For this reason, much of the building has been sealed temporarily with modern windows to prevent further damage. But Austin Storm has made it a goal to eventually restore all of them with original or accurate panes and framing. All windows that had the original glass and frame in-tact have been retained, and the ones that are too damaged to repair will be replaced with period accurate materials, in a period accurate style. Currently, he is training on-sight at St. Ignatius with an expert in historical window refurbishment to ensure he does the work accurately.

It isn't yet decided what St. Ignatius will be used for when renovations are finished. As with the Storm Cellar in Moscow, the Storms have made it their goal to give this historic building new life: it will eventually be manicured again, and filled with light, and it will have a day job.



You might be wondering whether that's wise, given how lucrative the ghost tours have been. I asked Val about that, and she assures me that the tours will always continue—that in fact parts of the hospital will remain unfinished for that purpose.

This comforted me a great deal. It is not long, walking in St. Ignatius, before you fall in love with the community that exists around this place—the historians, and adventurers, and ghosts; it is not long before you realize that it isn't only construction workers and daring entrepreneurs—indeed, it is not only the living—who are working to save this building.

The night Darius and I visited, we arrived just as the dusk was growing thick, and for a long while admired the strong and aged beauty of the place, as the darkness settled upon its edifice. We listened wrapped as Val told us its history of service, and the future of its healing. The masonry is broken in many places, but obviously sturdy overall. The pointing, of course, has suffered from age and will need care.

Where the building remains inaccessible, most of the windows are still empty of glass.

As we admired it, and as we shared our hopes for its better future, a fellow group of visitors arrived. They had just driven in from Yakima, a group of friends and family, none of whom considered themselves even amateur paranormal investigators, though some had toured other haunted buildings. Apparently they had seen St. Ignatius in its latest television appearance, on the enormously popular show *Ghost Adventures*. This came as comforting news, as the episode had aired just before the pandemic and it is certain that the hospital missed out on a great spike in visitors that would usually come after such a television appearance. But at least we see, here, almost two years after the episode aired, how potently the draw of our hospital sticks in people's minds: inspiring four hopefuls to drive across the state one Saturday to experience for themselves the incredible things they have heard take place in St. Ignatius.

According to Val, who also owns a shop in Colfax, visitors like these will stay for a day or two after their nighttime tour, patronizing local shops and hotels. She points out that when the ghost tours began in 2016, 14 new businesses had just opened in Colfax, and as of now in 2022, all of them are still open.

Val and Nancy, our guides into the chilling shadows, prepared us all with stories of recent spectral activity. Giddy and frightened, then, and as the Northwestern sky turned the darkest possible shade of blue, we entered.

While it is, of course, frightening to first enter the inky blackness of the hospital—and with only the narrow beam of a flashlight to navigate its cracked, peeling, Victorian complexity—the overall experience is not one of discomfort and fear. Nor does it seem to be the fear that draws people.



When asked just before entering, no one reported an uncomfortable level of anxiety except for Darius, and by the end even he had found a strange kind of comfort in the place, and still expresses a desire to return.

Odd as it is to say, by the time you leave, more than anything—more than fear, more than wonder—you feel a sense of community with this place. The way tour guides spend their nights here, helping curious people connect with curious spirits. The way those spirits reach out and create the hospital's widespread reputation for especially profound paranormal activity: the way they are, in a very real way, a vital element of the community that is making this restoration happen.

Despite the cold, and the darkness, you leave St. Ignatius feeling a certain, surprising warmth. And as you leave, you will already be planning your next visit. I know we are.

Tours of St. Ignatius run from Spring to Fall. They range from 2-6 hours, and private tours are available. You can book yours at <https://stignatiuscolfax.com/>

Pullman Depot: Masonry Repairs Near Completion and the Mystery of the Roof Uncovered

Finally freed from the 85-foot railcars that covered its street-facing side for several decades, repairs to the Pullman Depot are currently focused on the external masonry. The depot's outer walls are made of a double-layer of red brick, which, before recent repairs, was actually evident to the naked eye, as the external layer has crumbled so badly in some places that you could see the internal layer behind it. In such areas, bricks have been replaced and re-mortared. Repairs to the masonry also include replacing the sandstone trim that runs around the entire building and has worn away almost entirely in many places.

The work of replacing and repairing damaged bricks, as well as of cleaning and repointing the masonry overall, is being carried out by Pioneer Waterproofing out of Tigard, Oregon, who made a mid-price bid on the project. Their bid was accepted because of their reputation for quality work. As of now, they have completed all of the repairs and replacements, most of the deep cleaning, and will soon begin installing the new sandstone blocks.

This work on the external masonry is part of the ongoing first phase of the restoration project. The other major component of this phase will be repairing the roof, including a total renovation of the gutter system, the fascia boards and soffits, and the roofing. Some support beams that were removed by the previous owner will have to be replaced, and perhaps some of the plywood base as well, though how much exactly will not be known for sure until the current two layers of roofing are removed.

The building's original gutters were internal, meaning they are concealed by the fascia boards and soffits, within the eaves of the roof. Though these gutters were removed in the 1950s or 60s, it was hoped that they could be restored to recapture the original look of the building. However, the Restoration Committee ultimately decided to forgo this feature, and instead has recommended replacing the externally hung gutters that currently serve the building, though with ones more appropriate to the size of





the roof and local weather conditions.

As for the roofing, planning the renovation has actually been quite the journey, and multiple options are still under consideration. Even the material of the original roofing was, up until recently, a bit of a mystery.

Currently, the depot is roofed with metal panels on top of common asphalt shingles, probably installed in the 1980s. Before that, no record could be found. Volunteers did their



best by pouring through early photographs of the building, trying to find a good view of the roof, but even when one was finally discovered—a black-and-white shot from the 1920s—all that could be discerned was that the roofing was some kind of tile. Because of the photo's quality and lack of color, the exact style, color, and material of the roofing could not be surmised.

Then, about a year ago, volunteers were in the basement of the depot investigating a defunct coal chute when they saw what appeared to be a collection of old bricks, but which were revealed by the beam of a cellphone flashlight to be large, heavy terra cotta roofing tiles matching exactly the look of the 1920s photograph.

Perhaps placed there for safe-keeping when the roof was replaced, the tiles still bore their maker's mark: Ludowici Celadon Company out of Chicago. Which, it turns out, is still in business, and still makes this exact model and color of tile: called French-Interlocking Tiles in Vintage Green.

Now that the original roofing material was understood, the Restoration Committee could finally begin researching possible replacement options—their costs, lifetime warranties, appearance, and proximity to the original appearance—prior to making its recommendations to Design West for the bid package. They narrowed the choices to either a metal shingle or the Ludowici tile itself. Thoughts of a composite, sheet metal, or asphalt shingle were eliminated as inappropriate.

If you visit the Pullman Depot's Cargo



Room, you can hold samples of the original roof and its potential replacements in your own hands. The old terra cotta has an impressive weight and strength to it that are undiminished by its age. It is cool to the touch, and you can still feel the solid earth it is made of. The composite varieties, by contrast, feel like little more than injection plastic, and it is indeed hard to believe it would last as long or perform as well. Several metal roofing options can also be viewed.

We are in the early days of the depot renovation. For the roof, and for most future projects, bids are still out, funds are still incoming, and no firm decisions have been made. The entire five phase plan for renovating the Pullman Depot, as it is currently projected, is outlined in its Facility Master Plan.

However decisions unfold, the depot always benefits from your patronage. Keep an eye out for the two ongoing lecture series Palouse People and Book Talk. The previous Book Talk was enormously popular, and featured an author who had written about her adventures traveling every single road in Whitman County. It is rumored the next Palouse People may concern a daring grain caper in Colfax. There is currently a lecture event every other month. You can watch videos of recent lectures at

<https://www.whitmancountyhistoricalsociety.org/northern-pacific-depot>

Keep an eye on the Depot's Facebook page for the next one.

The building and train cars are still available for tours Saturdays 1pm-4pm. The freight room has been beautifully renovated, and can be rented as an event space for a modest hourly price. There is also a mid-size room off the old lobby that is available for rent as an office space. Contact lindahackbarth39@gmail.com

Lost Apple Project: This Year's Progress and an Exciting Development in the ID Process

This year, the Lost Apple Project sold over 100 historic apple trees and over 200 scions for grafting onto existing trees, most of them varieties that were once thought to be lost.



As of now, the project has re-discovered 29 apple varieties once thought lost to time. 11 more are suspected, but not yet confirmed. This fall, for the first time, all 40 varieties will be sent to Cameron Peace at WSU, who will check their DNA against his enormous database of apple varieties to check for false-positives and add to that database any positively identified varieties that are not already included in it.

Built by sampling trees from several major conservatories, databases like this are a vital tool for the future of apple identification and historic apple recovery. One day, all apple hunters will run their finds through such a database to see if that particular strain

has been documented anywhere else in the country, or whether it is currently unidentified.

This means both that the LAP's finds thus far will be confirmed to a new degree of scientific rigor, and that the LAP is now an active part of building the scientific tools that will be the future of the field.

According to David Benschoter, if an apple is truly a lost variety it will not be in the database, and will still have to be identified in the traditional manner: by apple identification experts, of which there are not many these days—David estimates about five. The ones David works with are Shaun Shepherd and Joanie Cooper, who compare the fruit and leaves of the tree to contemporary watercolor paintings commissioned by the US government, as well as to new and old apple books which provide rich descriptions of the tree and fruit. An apple, apparently, can have as many as 50 identifying characteristics that need to be confirmed.

For David's part, he searches for documentation that the suspected variety indeed grew in this area. This is largely done by checking for the variety's name in almanacs, homesteading guides, old nursery catalogs, and in old magazines and newspapers. Another valuable asset has been records from the agricultural program at WSU, which would collect and grow thousands of apple types so as to monitor their performance and make good recommendations to farmers on which ones might be best to plant.

Then, David or one of the 20 members of the Lost Apple Project Committee finds and maps homestead-era orchards, usually climbing down into long abandoned crags and valleys, to the sides of waterways where homesteaders would have planted their trees for good production. Dave says he always begins the identification process with taste: if an apple doesn't taste good, he says, it almost certainly wasn't a cultivated, named variety. This is because most seedling apples aren't very good tasting, and only the ones that were good tasting were worth keeping track of.

Dave explains that when our nation was young many seedling orchards were planted to make cider, which can be made from even the worst tasting apples. This early reliance on cider led to millions of apple seeds being planted, each one unique but seeded and used indiscriminately. When our forefathers found a really good one, though, they would share it with their neighbors. In order to remember it and communicate about it with other people, the apple was usually given a name based on its location or who owned it: the tree by the chimney, Mr.



Smith's apples, and so on. However, by 1858, when Walla Walla—the first town in eastern Washington—was started, people were no longer interested in planting cider orchards or apple trees with seed. They wanted named apples from nurseries, each one having a purpose for a homesteading family.

Tasty apples, then, are sent for DNA processing. When word is received that an apple is not in the DNA database, and when the apple ID experts then confirm it as a certain variety, Dave is finally charged with contacting nurseries, individuals with large apple collections, and government agencies to confirm the apple is not in someone's collection. Only after making these contacts can an apple be declared re-discovered.

When an apple is positively identified, Dave will use the maps he's made to find it again, cut off a piece of last year's growth, and graft it onto a root stock back home. If it is an unmanicured tree that has been growing wildly for the past century, it might be too overgrown with older wood to get any useful cuttings. In this case David will cut off a 2-3 inch thick branch so that in summer the cut limb will respond with new growth, and by the following year the tree will have produced a sample that is useable for grafting. After good cuttings are obtained from a tree, two are grafted onto rootstocks and are sent to the Temperate Orchard Conservancy in Clackamas County, Oregon, never to be lost again.

Eight years into the project, Dave says he's finally getting to the point where many of his cloned trees have grown large and strong enough that he can now cut pieces off of them for grafting, and no longer needs to return to craggy riversides and overgrown valleys, risking his neck to get a cut off an overgrown tree above a wild creek. The LAP, then, is quickly becoming not only a discoverer, but a self-sustaining producer of historic apples.

To find out when trees go on sale again, follow the Lost Apple Project on Facebook. When you're ready to purchase, email dbens23@gmail.com

If you want to learn more about the fascinating history of apple hunting, and about the journey of the LAP, keep an eye out for the book *Lost Apples of the Inland Empire: The Search for Extinct Apples in the Pacific Northwest*, co-written by David and our own Linda Hackbarth, set to be released this fall.

WCHS Archives: An Exciting New Project

When Alex Otero took over as Archivist the WCHS Archives last year, he set for himself a long-term



goal that is as ambitious as it is rich with potential: the development of a database that will be nothing less than a searchable, online record of not only every documented pioneer and ancestor in the history of Whitman County, but every documented detail we know about every ancestor, and every artifact we have in connection to them. This will be of great assistance to those trying to learn about our history: trading out the time consuming tasks of pouring over books and documents for the power and accuracy of electronic searchability.

It is as enormous a task as it sounds, but begins with a surprisingly simple first step: Alex is systematically digitizing the attendance registry from every year of the historic Whitman County Pioneer Picnic. This was an annual celebration of Whitman County's early settlers, and was widely attended by people from all over the area. While certainly not comprehensive, this will be a major first foot-in-the-door into establishing at least who was living in the county in each year since 1893. Onto this great central heart, everything we know and everything new we learn can be slowly added, gradually building the device that Alex envisions.

This task is obviously furthered enormously by the Archives' partnership with the Whitman County Genealogical Society, who for years have been working to index every mention of every name of every Whitman County resident in any document anywhere. That isn't an exaggeration. One of their major works is actually called the "Every Name Index." Reportedly, they collect every single book that mentions any single name of any person that ever lived in Whitman County. Clearly, they've found a warm home with the Archives, who share their dedication to fastidious collection, and whose similar long-time goal has been to archive any document relating to any persons, places, or events in the County's history.

So productive has been the partnership between these two organizations that their rather cozy offices—located on the main floor of the Gladish Community and Cultural Center in Pullman: in a small, almost invisible hallway shooting to the right, way at far the end of the main corridor—have become an invaluable tool for anyone curious to learn, or yearning to remember, the history of Whitman County. On any given Wednesday, people will wander in (probably after having asked one of the very nice Montessori school teachers for directions to the office) with their questions or their fuzzy memories, and often—profoundly enough—will find answers.

In my short time there, I learned the early history my own property in Pullman—saw the original plats, and learned the names of the men and women who first homesteaded it. I saw an email come in from a man looking for a photograph of his grandfather's store-front in Colfax from when it was operational over a century ago. I saw Alex, Ed, and Lou promptly uncover the photo he was looking for, as well as the entirety of his grandfather's major role in the development of the county. I saw people trickle in and out, and I saw people message, each looking for an answer and each finding even more than they expected.



I saw also the dozen fascinating side projects and tangents that the archivists find themselves chasing on a daily basis.

When I first entered the room, I found Alex pouring over a 1917 panoramic photograph of a company of WW1 soldiers. The soldiers stood on risers in the photograph, most of them straight-faced, some of them smiling rakishly. Each soldier had a number printed in white on their left shoulder, evidently added by the photographer after it had been developed. "And all of a sudden," Alex told me, "I said, wait a minute. They're all *numbered*. Who are they? They took time to number them, so there's a list." When he looked on the back of the photograph, Alex found the name and corresponding number of one of the soldiers, who evidently owned this copy. Immediately, he went searching for the name, wherever it might be in the records of the Archives and the Genealogical Society. So I stumbled upon him, in the process of pouring through his copy of *With Colors* and the *Every Name* index, trying to find a record of this single soldier, hoping he might eventually identify each of the unnamed men.

Strangely, I think this is largely how the work of building Alex's database is being carried out. It begins with the Pioneer Picnic registries, certainly, but as for building out from there—indexing our comprehensive knowledge of the people and moments who built Whitman County—it seems that the pieces are being slowly put together through small, fascinating tasks like this, and the other daily work of the Archives: that question by question, tangent by tangent, curious patron by curious patron, something vast is being built in the WCHS Archives. They are taking a great journey step-by-step, seeing just how far they can make. Because that, as Alex explains it to me, is how you eat an elephant.

The offices of the Archives and the Genealogical Society are open Wednesdays 9am-12pm. An archivist will usually be available to help with research. Also, if you know any history-buffs looking for an internship, Alex is looking for some self-starters to help with the Archives' various tasks. For more information contact ajax66@runbox.com