



WHITMAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 51, No. 4 – July/August 2024

Depot Days to Feature Speeder Cars

August 16 and 17



Once again, Depot Days will run concurrently with the Lentil Festival in Pullman. Featured at the Depot this year will be a number of speeder cars, graciously on loan from local owners, including **Frank Fleener** and **Roger Ferrell**.

The festivities will begin Friday night, August 16, with a ceremony at the Depot inducting notable Pullman residents into the Main Street Walk of Fame. WCHS's own **Ken Vogel** (1952 to 2016) will be one of them.

While you're at the Depot, take a look at how the Palouse Prairie plantings are doing on the bank, and pop into the Freight Room to see our new displays, especially one on the history of speeder cars. Notice the new Northern Pacific green paint on the window trim and new gutters, too! Docents will be on hand to answer

questions you might have. And while you're at it, have your picture taken in or next to the Lentil Express, which will be exhibited in the Depot's parking lot after the Lentil Festival Parade on Saturday morning.

*The following article tells you a little about Speeders. It was written by **Adam Burns** in March of 2024, for [American Rails Magazine](#).*

Railroad speeders [also known as motor cars, putt-putts, jiggers, crew cars, track-maintenance cars, trikes, quads, trolleys, or inspection cars] were once an integral and important part of railroad maintenance, allowing crews to inspect their section of railroad, as well as to transport them to wherever they may have been working. After their inception in the late 19th century, speeders became a staple on railroads and an important tool of maintenance-of-way crews.

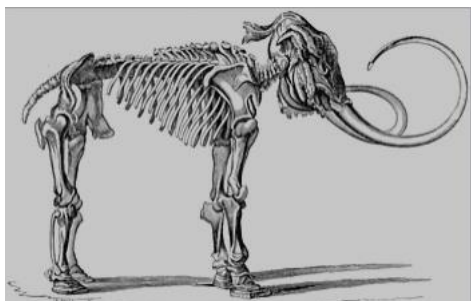
Over the years the machine advanced technologically; but it remained a rather simple thing, usually no more than five or ten feet in length and able to carry 2 to 4 passengers. It was

powered by a small, lawnmower-like engine. Eventually, the little contraptions were replaced by today's more economical and useful Hyrail trucks.

Speeders have not disappeared altogether, however. They have become a very popular hobby, and it is not unusual to see them traveling along tourist lines, abandoned routes, and short lines. Private owners have formed groups and now operate these unique machines, with permission, on trips all across the country along various branches and secondary railroad lines.

Classic speeders date back to around 1893, when the Sheffield Velocipede Company developed a primitive gasoline engine motor car. The company had originally been in the business of building velocipedes [wheeled machines powered by people, such as bicycles]. Later the company was purchased by Fairbanks-Morse (FM), eventually famous for its diesel locomotives. FM's designs featured two-stroke, gasoline powered engines. Most of were five to seven feet in length, held two people, were open-air designs, and weighed just a few hundred pounds. Only one model actually featured an enclosed cab.

Of all the manufacturers that built speeders over the years, the Fairmont Gas Engine and Railway Motor Car Company was the most successful. For 80 years, between 1911 and 1991, Fairmont built some 73,000 speeders. Overall, its models did not change much over the years, save for their crew size and small amenities (such as padded seats). Most models were able to cruise down the tracks at speeds between 25 and 40 mph.



Did You Know that a woolly mammoth skeleton was found near Rosalia in the spring of 1876? Curious about marshland near their homestead that shook when they walked on it, members of the Coplen family decided to probe the ground with poles and hooks. They discovered the backbone of a “very large animal,” including a huge shoulder blade and a thick chunk of ivory. Eventually they found 100s of prehistoric animal bones, spearheads, arrowheads, and

even a human skull. Loading the first and largest bones into wagons, the family took the mammoth bones to display in Colfax, then to Dayton, Walla Walla, The Dalles, and finally Portland, where a newspaper dubbed them “the Centennial Mammoth.” In 1893, they were exhibited in the Washington Pavilion at Chicago's World Columbian Exposition. The bones finally ended up in Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, where they remain today.

NEW PULLMAN MAYOR, FRANCIS BENJAMIN, CELEBRATES HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH by Allison Munch-Rotolo

In May, director of the WCHS Archive, **Alex Otero** (right) helped long-time WCHS member and City of Pullman Mayor **Francis Benjamin** (left) celebrate Historic Preservation Month. Otero provided panoramic photos of early Pullman, which were on display in the mayor's office all month.



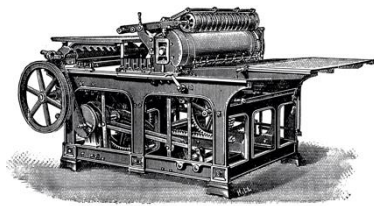


News from the Print Museum

by Janet Barstow

Roy Chatters Newspaper and Printing Museum volunteers have recently enjoyed several groups. One group was part of Exploration Bus Tours, originating near Olympia, and the museum was part of its three-day, two-night tour, "Exploring the Palouse." They printed a souvenir flyer on the 1878 Chandler & Price platen press; then while waiting for the ink to dry, they got back on their bus for an agricultural tour narrated by Washington Grain Commission chairman **Ben Barstow**.

Leah Hampton, assistant professor in the University of Idaho's department of English, brought a group of senior students completing their Master's Degrees in Fine Arts for a tour and printing session. Students used hand-set type and the proofing press for their own project, as well as the 1878 platen press for a souvenir flyer.



Quilt Show Results

The third Annual Vintage Quilt Show made just over \$500 this year, only about half as much as the first and second shows. It also ran only three days instead of four, one of the days coincided with WSU's graduation, it wasn't featured on the Community Update calendar this year, and people were avoiding the downtown area because Pullman's Main Street is closed due to construction. Still, the displays looked great, and Mayor **Francis Benjamin's** talk about his mother's quilts was well attended and very interesting. The Appalosa Lace Guild demonstrated bobbin lace making on all three Saturdays, and the handmade christening gowns on loan from the Perkins House drew a great deal of interest.

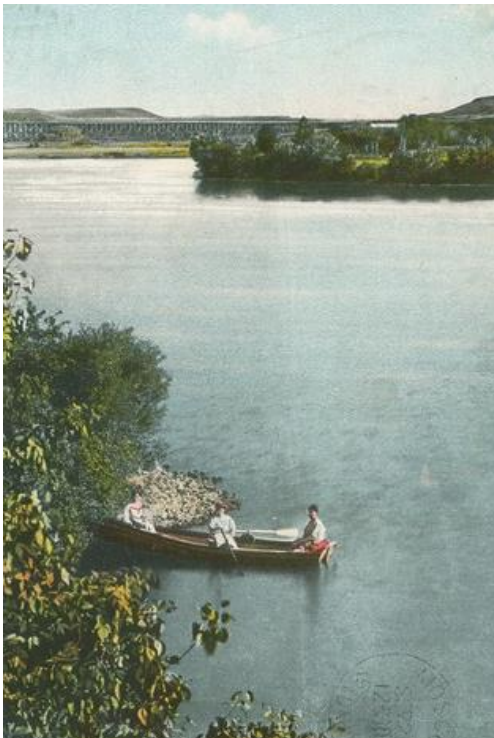
Raffle ticket sales totaled \$274, which was about four times what the silent auctions made each year in the past. **Tomara Jackson** won the Bear Basket, and **Tammy Cunningham** won the Honey Basket. **Martha Bobo** won the blue basket—her ticket was drawn from attendance tickets. **Debbie Sherman**'s quilt (page 3—a 16-patch, with a flying geese border, made approximately 50 years ago), was voted “favorite quilt” by attendees. A white, whole-cloth wedding quilt made in 1922 by the great-grandmother of **Kathy Meyer** came in second.

Sixteen volunteers made the quilt show possible, and over forty quilts were loaned by thirteen different members of the community. If you have't picked up your quilts yet, you can stop by the Depot on a Saturday afternoon between 1:00 and 4:00, or contact **Jamie Whitman**, the director of the Freight Room, at 509-332-1005 or jwhitman97@yahoo.com. Thank you to everyone!

Update on Rock Lake Project, by Greg May

To date, we have isolated a 500-square-foot area where any train car or remnants of same could only be located. The underwater environment in this area is extremely hazardous for divers or remotely operated equipment. The depth averages 320 feet, with numerous narrow fissures extending much deeper. The deepest recording to date registers 440 feet. This requires equipment much more sophisticated than what we currently have available, and it is well beyond SCUBA capabilities. From my shipwreck diving experience, I have always operated with the proviso that wrecks are best found by researching in a library first. By the time divers enter the water, they should already know where a wreck is probably located before getting their toes wet! The same goes for deploying most underwater equipment.

In this case we have determined the search area based mostly on a mindset of “where the wreck can't be.” Now it is time to utilize the type of equipment that has the capability to determine definitively if there is, in fact, a train wreck on the bottom of the lake. If one is found, sonar images and photos will be provided, and that will conclude our participation in this effort—others can take over from that point.



Rock Lake circa 1910, with Rock

As a result of our research and using the equipment we have used over the last two years, we have also been able to clear up many, if not all, of the anomalies historically attached to Rock Lake. Ghosts, monsters, strong currents, underwater rivers, etc. can now be rationally explained.

We have secured the commitment of a professional dive team with the requisite technical underwater equipment to perform a definitive search, should some individual or entity choose to fund it. The estimated cost ranges between \$6 to 12 million. The last search effort of this type, for recovery of a body, cost more than \$40 million. Since that time, underwater equipment (sonar, metal detectors, and so forth) have become much more advanced and less expensive. Now, knowing the dive environment in the search area, the type of equipment required for this search has been chosen by the dive team. They are confident that, even if only remnants of a train car remain, they will find them. If they cannot find evidence, then it is not there, nor ever was. They estimate a three-day expedition.

If you have questions contact Greg at: mayhem60@yahoo.com



Maddy Farnsworth has been volunteering at the Pullman Depot Heritage Center for five years—since it was purchased by the Whitman County Historical Society. She serves on the Rolling Stock Committee, and—on special occasions such as Depot Days—she lends items from her collection of diesel locomotive airhorns. She is also a volunteer for the Potlatch Depot Group, where she helped with the restoration of the depot building and a 1920s caboose, doing general construction and carpentry.



Interested in trains her entire life, Maddy is co-owner and project manager of the Washington Idaho Montana Historic Preservation Group, LLC, a project that took five years to develop. It is going to start running freight later this year and is looking into the possibility of passenger excursions in the future.

After growing up in Boise, Idaho, Maddy earned a BS in Biology in 2010 from the University of Idaho in Moscow. She liked the Palouse area so much that she never left. Two years ago, she married Isabel Farnsworth. The couple live in Pullman and have two dogs, a cat, and two horses.

When asked why she volunteers for the Depot, she said that when she heard that WCHS had purchased the old Northern Pacific Depot, she decided that she wanted to help – especially with the rolling stock. “I guessed that my area of expertise might be needed most on that committee,” she said.

Look for Maddy at the Depot during Depot Days, August 16 and 17.



FEATURED MUSEUM: ST. JOHN HERITAGE MUSEUM

In this issue we begin the first of a series on historical museums in Whitman County that are not owned by the Whitman County Historical Society.

First up is the St. John Heritage Museum, located at 3 Front Street in St. John. Operated by the St. John Historical Society, it is located in the same building that houses city hall—a former drug store that was donated by by the sons of **Glenn White**. In 2009, it had nothing but brick walls and a floor that was falling in. The basement was full of wet coal, and there was no power. This was all fixed

by local volunteers and advice from Washington State University interior design students.



The heritage center opened in 2013, with the mission of “Saving yesterday for tomorrow.” In particular, said volunteer **Lydia Smith**, “It’s about people and their stories.” We want “to keep the names alive, the forefathers, the farmers, the people who had businesses here.” We decided we didn’t want “a second-hand store full of butter churns,” she explained.

Of particular significance are the museum’s “Warrior Walls,” which tell the stories of local residents who served in World War II. Near the Warrior Walls are “Journey Stories,” which describe how early families first came to the

region. The museum also features numerous photographs of historic farming activities and area schoolhouses, as well as a collection of the paintings of Spangle artist **Nona Hengen**, whose works depict stories from Eastern Washington’s early history.

The heritage center is non-profit, and donations are tax deductible. Although it does not have regular hours, visitors can gain entry by checking in with the city clerk. The phone number is 509-648-2219

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 make a wonderful birthday present or a wedding gift for the couple who has everything. The form can be found below, or you can download it from the WCHS website (whitmancountyhistorical.society.org). Thank you!

If you have information for the next newsletter... please call either **Debbie Sherman** (509) 334-7389 or **Kathy Meyer** (509) 432-1336, or email them at jdjsherman@msn.com or klemeyer@gmail.com. We can’t print your stories unless you contact us!

2024 Calendar

July 18	WCHS Board Meeting, Perkins House, Colfax, 7:00 PM
August 16-17	Lentil Festival, Pullman
August 16-17	Depot Days, Pullman Depot
August 21	WCHS Board Meeting, PDCH Freight Room 7:00 PM
September ?	Palouse Days
September 5-8	Palouse Empire Fair, Jones Schoolhouse & Blacksmith Shop
September 18	WCHS Board Meeting, Print Museum, Palouse, 7:00
October (date TBA)	Annual Meeting
November 20	WCHS Board Meeting, PDHC Freight Room, 7:00 PM
December 7	Christmas Open House at the Perkins House, Colfax
December 7, 14, 21	Train Car Holiday Bazaar, Pullman Depot
December 18	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.

- Individual Membership - \$30
- Family Membership - \$50
- Business Membership - \$60
- Sustaining Membership - \$ 75
- Patron Membership - \$100 or more
- Life Membership - \$500 or more

Name of continuing or new member, or gift

Recipient: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

Name of giver, if applicable: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

I'd like to make an additional donation: \$25.00 \$50.00 \$100.00 other \$ _____

Please direct my donation to:

- Greatest Need
- Holy Trinity Chapel
- Perkins House and Cabin
- Roy Chatters Newspaper and Printing Museum
- Pullman Depot Heritage Center
- WCHS Archive

Note that WCHS is a 501c 3. Your gift is tax deductible. Total Amount Enclosed: _____

Send to: WCHS Membership Chairman PO Box 67 COLFAX WA 99111