



# WHITMAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

Vol. 53, No. 1– Jan./Feb. 2026

### WCHS Officers and Board Members for 2026

**Director:** Valoree Gregory (Steptoe)

**Officers:**

President: Jeff Pietela (LaCrosse)

Treasurer: Jon Anderson (Port Townsend)

Vice President: Marc Clinton (Colfax)

Secretary: Wendy Blake (Colfax)

**Board Members:**

Janet Barstow (Palouse)

Linda Hackbarth (Pullman)

Krista Boyd (Colfax)

Carol Larsen (Almota)

Pat Flansburg (Palouse)

Denise Mahnkey (Pullman)

**Project Leaders:**

*Bunchgrass Historian:* Katy Whalen (Pullman)

Coleman Cemetery: Molly Ringo (Portland)

Eden Valley Cemetery: Janet Barstow (Palouse)

Empire Theater: City of Tekoa

Holy Trinity Chapel: Pat Flansburg (Palouse)

Jones Schoolhouse: Krista Boyd (Colfax)

Lost Apple Project: Rebecca McGee (Pullman), Dave Benscoter (Chatteroy)

Oral History: Denise Mahnkey (Pullman)

Perkins House: Director position open

Pullman Depot Heritage Center: Linda Hackbarth (Pullman)

Building Restoration: Kathleen Ryan (Pullman)

Events and Education: Jamie Whitman (Pullman)

Fund Raising: Debbie Sherman (Pullman)

Rolling Stock: John-Mark Mahnkey (Pullman)

Roy Chatters Newspaper and Print Museum: Janet Barstow (Palouse)

St. Ignatius Hospital: Austin and Laura Storm (Colfax)

WCHS Archive: Alex Otero (Colfax)

WCHS Newsletter: Kathy Meyer (Pullman), Debbie Sherman (Pullman)

### Attention! The Perkins House Needs a New Director!

If interested, contact Val Gregory at 509-397-2555 or [wchsdirector1@gmail.com](mailto:wchsdirector1@gmail.com)

## Port of Whitman Receives \$1 Million Grant for Oakesdale Mill Restoration

by Cooper McCauley  
*Pullman News Radio*

The Washington State Community Economic Revitalization Board has awarded a \$1 million grant to the Port of Whitman County for construction at the historic Oakesdale Mill (Baron Flour Mill). The grant will fund critical improvements, such as replacing the roof and stabilizing the building's exterior, to extending water, sewer, and fiber utilities to the site. The funding comes from the new CERB Rural Ports Program, which promotes economic development in rural areas through infrastructure projects at rural ports.



The Port acquired the Oakesdale Mill in 2024 when Innovia Foundation transferred ownership. Innovia purchased the mill in early 2024 with support from the Oakesdale community and former resident

Larry Stanley. Construction is anticipated to begin in August 2026 and be completed by the end of 2026, marking the first phase of the Port's preservation efforts.

Last year, the Port completed a feasibility study exploring future uses for the mill through a public open house, a survey, advisory group meetings, and stakeholder interviews. Community members identified historic preservation and economic viability as the top priorities for site development.

"The Town of Oakesdale is thrilled that restoration is starting on the mill," said Oakesdale Mayor Dennis Palmer. "We are grateful to the Port for involving the community on day one and listening to the community's wants and needs for the building."



## Elberton Sign Donated to Print Museum

by Janet Barstow

The Palouse Museum was happy to receive the Davison's Grocery sign, which was recently donated by John Elwood and Sally Burkhart. John and Sally are well-known historians and longtime residents of Elberton, once a thriving town of

500. Various events, including a fire and flood, as well as key business closures, led to declining population and ultimately disincorporation in 1966. Three years later, a grant enabled the county to take ownership of most of the town's land, hoping to turn it into a county park.

Davison's Grocery, which the sign painter misspelled (it should have been "Davidson"), was Elberton's last business, operating until the mid-1970s. Mrs. Davidson was an elementary teacher in Palouse in the 1960s, and the grocery store was a unique stop and remembered by many.

Stop by the Print Museum and share a story about Elberton, learn more about the Palouse area, and see first-hand how newspapers and other printing was done prior to the 1960s. The

museum is closed except by appointment in January, then will be open Saturdays from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Appointments are available by calling 509-330-0353 or 509-878-1739.

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## Live Theater Returns to Palouse via the Print Museum

by Janet Barstow

The Roy Chatters Newspaper Museum (aka “The Palouse Museum”) was privileged to host the first-ever production by the Tipping Boat Theatre Co. in December.

A sell-out crowd of 75 people for each of 2 nights appreciated the ambiance of the museum for the reading Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, presented by 20 local residents. The event was part of a community collaboration to restore live theater in Palouse, and the Museum was happy to be part of yet another community partnership.



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## Fiscal Sponsorships Requested from WCHS

Fiscal Sponsorship is a financial and legal arrangement in which an established, tax-exempt nonprofit (the sponsor) hosts a new or smaller project, allowing it to operate under the sponsor's 501(c)(3) status for donations and grants. The sponsor provides administrative support, often in exchange for a fee, letting the project focus on its mission without the lengthy process of forming its own nonprofit. WCHS is currently the fiscal sponsor of the St. Ignatius Hospital in Colfax, and previously sponsored Trinity Chapel in Palouse.

Three requests for fiscal sponsorship were recently received from a) the Coleman Cemetery outside of Pullman, b) the Eden Valley Cemetery outside of Palouse, and c) the Empire Theater in Tekoa.

The Coleman Cemetery is located in the now defunct town of Fallon, a few miles north of Pullman. It contains the burials of 58 people. Death dates on the headstones range from 1867 to 1991. When it was abandoned, the descendants of the Coleman family, especially pioneer John Gribble Ringo, recognized the need for long-term care. The family set up an endowment to make sure operating funds will continue to be available for yearly upkeep and maintenance.

The Eden Valley Cemetery is located 5 miles east of Palouse on Highway 272. Another historic cemetery, it is the resting place of 140 people, many of whom were the first settlers in the Palouse area. The first burial was in 1888 and the last was in 1956. Maintenance is provided by community members.

The third request for sponsorship came from the Empire Theater in Tekoa, which recently lost its non-profit status and is trying to regain it. The 280-seat, art-deco movie theater was built in 1940 and closed in 1958. It is located at 126 South Crosby St. For the next 40 years, it was used annually for

entertainments that were part of Slippery Gulch Days. Since its restoration, which began in 2000, it has become an established performing arts center for the county and surrounding areas.

**Featured Museum: Eastern Washington Agricultural Museum**

99 Fairgrounds Road, Pomeroy WA 99347  
509-843-1723



In Garfield County, south of Whitman County (on the other side of the Snake River), the county fairgrounds feature two buildings full of antique farming equipment—from horse-drawn to motorized items from the mid-1950s, as well as things to see outside. Exhibits are clean and nicely displayed, with educational information available for visitors. A popular feature (“What’s This?”) asks visitors to identify agricultural implements that were used in the past. Demonstrations of farming with horses are held every April. An appointment is needed to see inside exhibits. Call 509-843-1723 for further information.



**Brandon Burch** has been a member of the Steering Committee at the Pullman Depot Heritage Center since 2019. He also serves on the Depot’s Rolling Stock Committee and its Facilities Committee, and he gives computer and technological advice when needed for upgrades at the Depot and for special events there.



Retiring in 2019 after 30 years in Information Technology at the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine, Brandon also serves on the Foundation Board of Directors for Pullman Regional Hospital, and he volunteers for Trinity Lutheran Church and the WSU Lutheran Campus Ministry. Brandon grew up in a number of places in the Pacific Northwest; he is a WSU alumnus and his wife Marilyn is a U of I alumna. They have two adult children: their son, like his father, is a software engineer; and their daughter is head of the Archive at the University of Illinois.

When asked why he volunteers at the WCHS Depot, Brandon said, “I like to build things and work with wood, and I thought the Depot would be a great place to put my skills to good effect.”

**2026 Calendar**

Feb. 18	Executive Meeting and Trust Report, Pullman Depot, 6:00 Board Meeting, Pullman Depot, 7:00
March 18	Board Meeting, Perkins House, Colfax, 7:00
April 15	Board Meeting, Print Museum, Palouse, 7:00 PDHC Quilt Show, Pullman (date and times TBA)
May 20	Board Meeting
June 5-6	Battle Days, Rosalia
June 17	Board Meeting, Archive, Pullman, 7:00
June 20	Slippery Gulch Days, Tekoa
July 4	Pioneer Days, Endicott
July 15	Board Meeting, Perkins House, Colfax, 7:00
Aug. 19	Executive Meeting, Pullman Depot, 6:00

