



WHITMAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Depot Days: “Tractors, Grains, and Trains”

by Debbie Sherman

If you're planning to attend the Lentil Festival, you can also visit the Pullman Depot Heritage Center as it kicks off festivities for Depot Days. Starting on Friday, August 18, you can attend a Palouse People “Talk and Walk” program by Pullman's Gary Simpson, a member of the Lewis Clark Antique Power Club. Gary is bringing items from his vintage farm machinery collection and will be explaining their history and use beginning at 6:30 PM. His machinery display will be located in the northwest end of the Depot's parking lot.



On both Friday evening and all-day Saturday, you can explore our exhibits and participate in a variety of activities. This year's activities will mostly revolve around local agriculture by focusing on the role railroads played in facilitating the shift from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Featured will be movies of local harvesting from more than 90 years ago and the operation of the Snake River Breaks grain tramways, which transported sacked grain nearly three-quarters of a mile and down 2,300 feet to the shores of the Snake River.

Dave Benscoter Steps Down as Head of Lost Apple Project

Dave Benscoter (Chattaroy) has recently turned over the reins of the LAP to **Rebecca McGee** (Pullman). Dave, who grew up in Pullman and served as a federal law enforcement officer for 24 years, initiated the project in 2015. Often nicknamed “the apple detective,” he will continue to be involved in the project.

Rebecca McGee (Pullman) is a Research Geneticist and Adjunct Professor of Horticulture at Washington State University (WSU). She has been involved with the LAP for two years.

Depot Roof Restoration Almost Complete!



Before

After

New tiles have replaced the damaged and leaking red metal roof at the Pullman Depot Heritage Center. Planning began more than three years ago, after one of the original clay tiles was discovered in the attic by project director **Kathleen Ryan** (Pullman). She subsequently discovered several more in the basement. The Steering Committee was able to order exact replicas from the same company that made the originals (the Ludowici Company in New Lexington, Ohio), which were placed on the roof in 1917 and removed in the early 1950s. Installation of the new tiles was completed in June. Soffits and gutters should be finished soon. The roof project was funded by many generous private donations and a Washington State Capital Heritage Grant.

Fair Schedule for the Jones Schoolhouse and the Blacksmith Shop

Swing by the Jones Schoolhouse while you're at the Palouse Empire Fair in September to see its freshly painted exterior and new roof! Mini-lessons and docent-led tours of the schoolhouse will again be available Thursday through Sunday, September 7 to 10. On Thursday the schoolhouse will be devoted to mini-lessons for visiting third-graders, but it will be open to the general public after school ends, from 2:00 to 5:00 PM. Open hours for Friday and Saturday are from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM and Sunday from noon to 4:00 PM. Docents and teachers will include **Krista Jones Boyd** (Colfax), **Val Gregory** (Steptoe), and **Kathy Meyer** and **Denise Mahnke** (Pullman).



The Blacksmith Shop will again feature vintage farm tools and machinery—visitors can take a self-guided tour. Most items will be labeled, with brief descriptions of their use. It will be open from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM Thursday through Saturday, and from noon to 4:00 PM on Sunday.

Did you know that Whitman County was formed out of Stevens County in 1871, when Washington was still a Territory? The new county also included modern Adams and Franklin counties—which weren't separated from Whitman County until 1883. (Note that when Stevens County was created in 1863, it encompassed most of northern Washington, east of the Cascades and north of the Snake River.)

Historic Homesteads Yield Two More Apple Varieties — by Dave Benscoter

In June, two varieties of “lost” apples, the Polly Bemis and the Gamble Gold, were added to the list of apple varieties “found” by the Lost Apple Project (LAP) and its partner groups since its creation in 2015. The two bring the number to 30 now! The Polly Bemis Ranch, which was designated as a National



Historic site in 1988, is located on the upper Salmon River and yielded one of the apples; the other was found in the homestead orchard of pioneer Daniel Gamble, near Moscow, ID. Both will be planted in the Heritage Orchard at Washington State University (WSU).

Although most of the apple trees on the Bemis Ranch have been identified, two trees of the same variety were picked by the LAP. They were examined by the Temperate Orchard Conservancy (TOC) in Oregon, and later DNA tested by WSU. Neither identification method was able to reveal the name of the variety, because its fruit and its DNA did not match any other known variety. Rather than leave the apple nameless, the LAP and TOC, supported by the Historical Fruit Tree Working Group of North America, agreed to a provisional name of the apple. The “Polly Bemis” is considered a summer apple and ripens in early September. It is red, of medium size, and has an excellent sweet-tart taste. It will be available to the public beginning in 2024.

Polly Bemis is a folk hero from early Idaho history. She was born in China in 1853 and forcibly taken to Idaho Territory at the age of 19. Her story has been the subject of books and film. LAP committee member **E.J. Brandt** obtained access to the ranch, which is only possible by boat or helicopter—it is located approximately 44 miles east of Riggins, ID, on the main Salmon River.

The second apple variety was likely planted by Daniel Gamble soon after he established a 160-acre homestead near Moscow in 1880. As in the Bemis orchard, two identical trees, planted side-by-side, could not be identified by the TOC or DNA testing at WSU. The apple has thus been given the provisional name of “Gamble Gold.” It is a beautiful yellow/gold and ripens in mid-October. The apple has a great sweet-tart taste and is of medium size. Gamble’s great-great grandson, **Dave Wahl**, recalled the orchard and said he considered it mature even when he was very young.

The LAP partnered with the TOC eight years ago to try to find lost/extinct apples in Washington. The area was later expanded to Idaho and Oregon. In addition, the group spawned an additional Lost Apple Project group in Idaho.

The TOC is run by **Joanie Cooper** and **Shaun Shepherd**. Included in its mission is the identification and preservation of heirloom and historic tree fruit specimens. Apples can have as many as 50 identifying characteristics, which Joanie and Shaun use to identify apple varieties from books and old watercolor paintings.

Washington State University Professor **Cameron Peace** has collected a DNA profile dataset of over 3,000 apple varieties. This reference is crucial as a final step to confirm or refute whether an apple is a once-lost variety. DNA testing is also often able to connect trees to their parent and grandparent varieties, linking stories and events across generations of valuing, distributing, cultivating, and enjoying apples by our forebears.

The LAP is a non-profit under the Whitman County Historical Society. The TOC is a non-profit in Molalla, Oregon. Both projects exist because of the generous donations of supporters. The Historical Fruit Tree Working Group of North America is a group of fruit enthusiasts, collection managers, historians, authors, lost cultivar hunters, scientists, and educators with the mission of facilitating the conservation of historic fruit tree cultivars (officially named varieties) in North America through documentation, identification, collaboration, and education. The Working Group has been trialing a systematic process for establishing identities and assigning cultivar names to fruit trees, especially apple trees of historical significance.

Nancy Rothwell & Jim Fitzgerald Voted WCHS Volunteers of the Year

by Valoree Gregory

Nancy Rothwell and **Jim Fitzgerald** have been recognized as Volunteers of the Year for 2022. (See photo at right of WCHS president **Marc Clinton** presenting the award at the Ice Cream Social in June). Nancy began volunteering for the Perkins House five years ago at a time when it was struggling to find volunteers and get projects done. At first, Nancy assisted former director **Theresa Dale** (Thornton) and then took over as director two years later. Nancy's husband Jim soon joined the volunteers at the Perkins House, too.

Nancy's talents, personality, and organizational skills reversed the downturn. Together, she and Jim spearheaded the house's new foundation, which was needed to save the building. Jim's construction knowledge and experience saved a substantial amount of money for the project. Nancy and Jim also saved the cabin by clearing out the mud and dirt that had slid down the hill behind it over the years. They recruited a yard crew as well, and the grounds now look beautiful.



WCHS would like to thank Nancy and Jim for all they do for the Society and for the City of Colfax.

New Sign at the Depot!

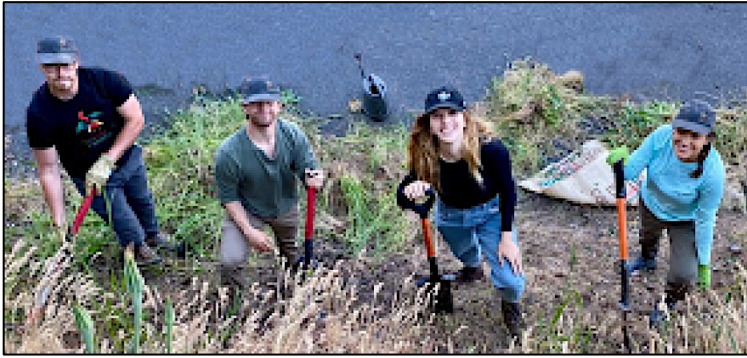
A new permanent sign now greets visitors to the Pullman Depot Heritage Center. Installed in June, it replaces the tattered remnants of the temporary canvas sign that Depot volunteers placed over the old "Pufferbelly" sign when WCHS purchased the property in 2018. Severe winds over the winter had damaged the canvas beyond repair.

The new sign is lighted at night and features the Depot's steam engine icon, which was designed by local artist and former Depot Steering Committee member **Dave Hoyt**. It was created and installed by Sign Crafters, Inc., of Lewiston, Idaho.



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.

Palouse Pocket Prairie Project



With restoration of the Pullman Depot Heritage Center fully underway, improvements to its grounds are being planned and implemented. This is necessary in part because the spectacular poppy display on the site's northeast bank is gradually being overtaken by unwelcome invasive species (aka weeds). To address this problem, the Depot has partnered with

the Palouse Prairie Project and the Phoenix Conservancy. First came groundbreaking and weeding, shown above with volunteers **Jacob Wangelin, Nathan Maize, Shannon Collins, and Sophia Blanco**. In particular they removed field bindweed, bulbous bluegrass, Kentucky bluegrass, and salsify, among others.

The phased, multi-year project will replace the weeds on the southwest end of the bank with “pocket prairies”—an effort to conserve the highly endangered Palouse ecosystem through the creation of an interconnected network of native plant restoration patches. By utilizing urban landscapes for native plant species restoration, planters of all sizes can be converted from invasive and unsightly weeds back to attractive, low-maintenance “pockets” of the native ecosystem. “This helps protect and maintain biodiversity, as well as clean and conserve groundwater, all the while restoring the local natural sense of place,” says project coordinator **Jenny Carlson**. Each planter will contain a variety of native plant species that will bloom from early spring through fall. The new landscaping will use water more efficiently, and plants will be labeled in order to create an educational and informative experience for visitors.

If you are interested in volunteering for this effort, email Jenny (jenny.louise.carlson@gmail.com) or go to pullmandepot.facilities-at-gmail.com.



Rosalia's 53rd Battle Days

The town of Rosalia celebrated its 53rd Battle Days on June 2 and 3. The festival, which was first held in 1970, commemorates the victory of a coalition of the Coeur d'Alenes, Palus, and Spokans—plus members of other tribes—in the Battle of Tohotonimme, which was fought in mid-May of 1858 south of town. (The battle is also called the Battle of Pine Creek, the Battle of Steptoe, and Steptoe's Defeat, after the leader of the United States Cavalry, Col. Edward Steptoe.)

This year's celebration featured a concert by “Just Plain Darin” on Friday night, 2 parades on Saturday, a community breakfast, a BBQ at noon, a fun run, a pickle ball tournament, and an assortment of vendors. Battle Days generates funds to support the Rosalia Museum and various local service organizations.

Fun Fact!

According to *Heart of Washington*, Whitman County produces more barley, wheat, dry peas, and lentils than any other county in the United States.

Steam Engine Bell Donated

Longtime WCHS member **Suzanne Myklebust** (Pullman) recently donated an antique steam engine bell to the Pullman Depot. The bell, which was purchased in the early 1950s by her mother Mildred Reard, supposedly came from the last steam engine to pass through Spokane. She intended to use it as a dinner bell on the family ranch, but never managed to get a stand built for it. Suzanne inherited it and has owned it for many years. Director Val Gregory says that it will be an important part of the process of telling the story of the Depot, and WCHS is thrilled to have it. The bell will be on display during Depot Days—drop by and see it, or even ring it!



This issue's volunteer spotlight is on **Kelly McGee**, a kitchen/bath designer at Pullman Building Supply, who serves on the Depot's Steering Committee, as well as on its Education and Events Committee. She is also in charge of keeping the Depot's "necessary facilities" clean—and does so with good cheer and a smile on her face! Additionally, she volunteers for many of the Depot's seasonal outdoor clean-up days.



Kelly studied Fundamentals of Design at Wichita State University, majoring in Visual Art and Interior Design. Before she moved to Pullman in 2014, she lived in La Grande, Oregon, where she owned a design boutique. She spent 19 years volunteering for the LaGrande Downtown Association, 4 years on its Main Street Project, and 8 years on its City Council.

When asked why she donates so much of her time to WCHS, Kelly said that she is intensely interested in helping to preserve Pullman's historic buildings.

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. Membership would also make a great birthday or Christmas gift for a friend or relative! The form can be found below, or you can download it from the WCHS website (whitmancountyhistoricalsociety.org). Thank you!

2023 Calendar

August 16	WCHS Board Meeting, Pullman Depot Freight Room
August 18-19	Depot Days, Pullman Depot
August 19	Pullman Lentil Festival
September 7-10	Palouse Empire Fair (the Jones Schoolhouse and the Blacksmith Shop)
September 16	Palouse Days
September 20	WCHS Board Meeting, Print Museum, Palouse
October 8	WCHS Annual Meeting, Steptoe School
October 20, 21, 27, 28	Haunted Palouse (new horrors at the Print Museum)
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 (Christmas Open House at the Perkins House)
December 2, 9, 16	Christmas 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.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership - \$30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Membership - \$ 75 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership - \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron Membership - \$100 or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Membership - \$60 | <input type="checkbox"/> 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: _____

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E-mail: _____

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

Please direct my donation to:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greatest Need | <input type="checkbox"/> Roy Chatters Newspaper and Printing Museum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holy Trinity Chapel | <input type="checkbox"/> Pullman Depot Heritage Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Perkins House and Cabin | <input type="checkbox"/> 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