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LATAH COUNTY MUSEUM SOCIETY

McConnell Mansion      110 South Adams      Moscow, Idaho

Quarterly Bulletin  
Kenneth B. Platt, Editor

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July 1, 1976

Comments by the Society's President

The element of change is ever present. The museum is no exception. Methods change, the old giving way to the new, people come and go. With the ending of May, I suppose we might say that Lou Cormier's official association with the museum operation ended. In the practical sense this is not so, and never will be. Lou was discovered at a time when someone with his particular combination of experience and talent was needed to help shape and organize, plan and conduct, build and maintain, meet the public, and chase about in pursuit of those seemingly little endless but important contacts which kept the activities of the Society before the public and constantly improved upon them. Whether it was exhibits, meeting the public, interior arrangements, making the living quarters a pleasant place, or landscaping the grounds, Lou had a sort of built in reservoir of knowledge and experience needed to come up with a solution, followed by the ability and perseverance to complete it. The visit by a school class, an interested stranger, a group meeting or an organization potluck were alike received in a gracious manner and informed or hosted as the occasion called for.

Just how long Lou was with us I don't know nor will I take the time to check. Perhaps three years or more--it makes no difference--and that time has gone by terribly fast. But we will not think of Lou as gone. He has merely taken on another interesting assignment, is close by, will drop in to see us often, and his good counsel and advice as a member of the Society we hope will be available for the asking for a long time to come. We all wish him happiness and success in his new venture.

Replacing Lou officially is Lee Magnuson, a native of Latah County and a 1976 graduate in museology from the University of Idaho. A more detailed account appears elsewhere in this issue. Museology as a major subject is relatively new at the University. A few years ago it might not have been surmised that the Museum, as presently constituted, could be a valuable training ground, not only as a laboratory for certain class work, but as an area for interim assignment and employment to give experience as a stepping stone to better job opportunities. The Museum is not sufficiently departmentalized to require a director, and may never be. It does have a sufficiently varied range of activities common to the smaller local museum to require the services of a curator, or person with this expertise, however titled, to oversee and perform these duties. We are fortunate to obtain a university graduate to do this for us and gain valuable experience at the same time.

In a period of inflationary costs, the Museum is lightly funded. Its chief support is through county funds with some additional income through memberships, publications, and miscellaneous fund-raising projects from time to time. Planning, guidance, and productive efforts of many kinds have been supplied by a sizable number of members and interested persons who have contributed hundreds of hours annually. Most of our regular income goes for utilities, maintenance, and operating expenses. Considerable outlays have gone to major improvements. This is a continuing situation, and money available is not sufficient to fund a curator's position. It is therefore funded as a training position only at considerably less than the usual salary of a regular position.

The possibility may develop whereby we can fund a position under a CETA grant when the newly adjusted Federal fiscal year comes into being and funding is provided. While the future of such funding is always uncertain for any extended period, it could help us for an indefinite period by paying the salary for a position we can only partially finance now with the money we have.

We are now assured that the Oral History Project, proceeding under Sam Schragar, will be funded through the



end of this calendar year. This will supply needed time to transcribe and catalog tapes already collected, complete loose ends, and make selected interviews which might be otherwise lost. Rachel Foxman, a University of Idaho graduate with previous experience, has volunteered her time, without pay, to work on transcripts during the summer. This kind of interest and devotion deserves our highest praise.

Again, under the CETA program Roger Vanderhye, a college student, has been assigned to us. He is doing the yard work, pruning, trimming, and many small projects awaiting attention. He will complete work on the lower sash and storm windows, painting and enameling of porches, exit door and fire escape, to mention a few.

A major project, completion of a new water line from the street connection into the basement has been completed. In all we have an interesting and productive summer schedule underway. New hand rails have been placed on the front entry steps as suggested by insurance underwriters and the door to the fire escape reversed for easier exit. Few of these projects are spectacular or even noticeable, but they are of the kind which add continuously to the improvement, utility, and appearance of the plant. Many other activities are continually taking place, but it is not possible to cover them in this limited space. They will make themselves known in other articles, news media, and the fact that they just happen and you become aware of them.

--Leonard Ashbaugh

### Mary Perrine, In Memoriam

Mary Louise Perrine died at a Moscow nursing home May 25, following a lengthy illness. Born in Moscow in May 1913, she was the daughter of Ben Bush and his wife, the former Carrie McConnell. Mary Louise attended Moscow schools and, after graduation from the University of Idaho in 1934, spent a year in Washington, D.C., with Senator and Mrs. William E. Borah, her aunt and uncle.

Later, after the death of Senator Borah in 1940, she returned to Washington and spent several years as an office worker. It was during this time that she wrote her aunt's memoirs, which are being published this month by the University of Idaho Research Foundation.

After seventeen years as a teacher of first grade on Indian reservations, Mrs. Perrine returned to Moscow, where she has lived for the past six years. She is survived by her brother, Ben Bush, of California; her niece, Ben's daughter, Kathy Benek, of Bellevue, Washington; two cousins, Mary (Mrs. W. F.) Schedler, of Portland, Oregon, and Joan (Mrs. Allen) Ainey, of Vancouver, Washington. Mrs. Schedler and Mrs. Ainey are the daughters of the late Ollie McConnell Lueddeman, sister of Carrie Bush.

At Mrs. Perrine's request no funeral or memorial service was held.

### A Last Tribute

by

Mary N. Banks

Mary Louise (Bush) Perrine, whose death at age 63 was noted in the *Idahonian* of May 25, was known widely for her very appealing Navajo stories for children. Less widely, perhaps, she was known as a granddaughter of Governor McConnell, whose home in Moscow is now a historical museum, and as a niece of Mrs. William Borah. Soon her name will again appear in print as the author, or transcriber, of Mrs. Borah's reminiscences, to be published by the Idaho Research Foundation under the title Elephants and Donkeys.

I would like, however, to sketch lightly a word portrait of Mary Louise as a private individual. She was first known to us--Bill and me--as a college undergraduate, and later as a sprightly correspondent about two of her worlds: the Washington, D.C., "scene" centered in the household of "Aunt Mamie" and the Navajo domain of the



Southwest where she lived and taught for many years and came to love the Indian peoples and their culture.

Mary Louise always had warmth and whimsy. I remember her earliest as one of the "B Street girls," as we called them then. The Bush home (now Professor Hackman's) was next door to the Kennard home (now Professor Sullivan's). Mary Louise Bush, the Kennard girls, and the Thompson girls, whose home was further east on B Street (Mary Kiblen was one of three Thompson sisters then living there) were the members of this group--at least in our minds, though I make no pretense to really knowing their relationships or activities or their other pals. What I do remember is the whimsical and imaginative quality of mind which Mary Louise, "Tiddle" as she was sometimes called, brought to these friendships. I remember her telling of their sitting down by turns at a typewriter and letting reverie dictate, come what would. I remember experimental drawings, too, of the reverie type, abstract free-flowing art which even amateurs like Bill and me could indulge in.

Here, however, I must acknowledge the sketchiness of my own contacts. Mary Louise graduated from the U. of I., was married to Eugene Perrine--pianist and artist--with whom she visited us after we, too, had become B Street residents, resided in Pocatello at one time. Later she was divorced, had "analysis," lived and worked in Washington, D.C., came back for a teaching credential from Idaho, and finally became a beloved teacher of Navajo children both on and off the reservations of Arizona and New Mexico.

But it is not the events of her life I can testify to. I am vague on many of them. What I hope I shall always remember is her never-failing affection for her home town of Moscow and for her friends here; her love for her tiny--often timid, but not for long--pupils; her enthusiasm for the Navajo, their way of life, their psychology and their proud culture; and the pleasure she received from their acceptance of her not only as a teacher and friend but as an adopted "daughter" among them.

Out of her teaching grew her books, Salt Boy, Nannabah's Friend, and The Doll with the Yellow Hair. We had many a conversation about the stories as they evolved and about the language in which they were couched. Every word had to be true to Navajo ways of thinking and speaking, and every detail of description and action had to fit the native scene as she knew it. Finally there is that beautiful film of Nannabah, an Idaho-Arizona project, which through her persistent efforts in the face of a devastating illness was put together by talented friends and associates.

I have said enough. Let Mary Louise speak for herself, in a quotation from one of her letters. Writing from Crownpoint, New Mexico, in 1958 she says:

"Do you remember in my story about the little boy that one of his cousins heard an owl, and a medicine man came and sang for him? . . . The mother of one of my little girls tells me her grandfather is a very good singer, and that he knows this song. She also assures me that he will sing for me, and we have a tentative appointment for next Sunday to go out to his hogan and bring him to my home. . . .

"One of the singers who sang for me also said a prayer that goes like this:

I am the child of Ever Changing Woman.  
Something of Ever Changing Woman is within me while  
I am saying this.  
The dark spirit within her is within me while I am  
saying this.  
Translucent light is within me while I am saying  
this.  
When I go forth, beauty goes in front of me,  
and follows me, and is under me,  
and above me. . . .  
All my words are beautiful while I go forth  
to inner beauty."

Surely in her going forth, no one understood better than Mary Louise the true meaning of "inner beauty."



### New Curator Takes Over

On June 1, following his graduation from the University of Idaho, Lee Magnuson assumed full duties as curator of the Latah County Museum. Lee has been the resident of the McConnell Mansion since January, during which time retiring curator Lou Cormier instructed him in the operations of the museum.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Magnuson, Lee is a lifetime resident of Kendrick. He displayed an interest in history and objects from the past at an early age. He began gathering relics and "antiques" at the age of six, and the resulting "museum" filled one room of his parents' home.

Graduating from the Kendrick schools in 1972, Lee entered the University of Idaho. He chose a double major in American Studies and Museology, two programs which afforded an excellent overview of American history and culture, with specific training in museum techniques and administration.

During the summer of 1975 Magnuson received further museum training. He was awarded an Historic Deerfield Summer Fellowship, which provided close contact with early American history and with many fine museums. The program takes place in Deerfield, Massachusetts, a small town founded in 1673 which today is still a living village with restored colonial house museums located among the other residences. The fourteen summer fellows guided tours in these houses, compiled detailed research projects, worked with museum collections, and traveled to other museums and preservation projects. Lee researched a 1783 house where some of the fellows lived for the summer.

Among projects completed during Lee's years at the U. of I. were a history of Big Bear Ridge near Kendrick and a study of the "Kirby-Long" house (Marvin Long home) in Kendrick.

Lee's other interests include music and dance, furniture restoration and chair caning, Scandinavian culture, weaving, and many special historical topics.

The Society is indeed fortunate to have as curator a person whose familiarity with Latah County, as well as his training in museology and his lifelong interest in the field, would seem to fit him so well for the position.

### From the Desk of the Curator

As the new curator of McConnell Mansion, let me say that I am happy to have the opportunity to put my training in museology to use in a position which offers the great opportunities that I see here. Not only does the Society have a beautiful and historic building which has been lovingly and elegantly restored through the efforts of a dedicated group of people, but it has the potential for developing and expanding its programs to make an ever greater contribution to the social, cultural, and educational life of the county.

May I take this occasion to urge all members who have not visited the Mansion recently to plan to do so sometime soon? Some exhibits have been changed (of which more later), and a number of interesting new articles have been donated to the museum's collection.

The hours when the Mansion is open to the public have been expanded. New hours are from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. It is my hope eventually to become acquainted with all Society members who live in the area. I would appreciate any suggestions you might have regarding exhibits or programs, and I hope each of you will feel that whenever you can visit the Mansion, you are assured of a warm welcome.

This spring former curator Lou Cormier, with my help, constructed two new room exhibits. A period kitchen on the ground floor illustrates the furnishings and equipment of the time of the McConnell's residency. Now



complete, the kitchen could use a few finishing touches. These include a calendar of the period 1886-1910, a towel rack and dish towels, a pitcher pump for the sink, a few blue willow or other appropriate table settings, a red and white checked tablecloth, and more kitchen utensils.

The new costume exhibit room upstairs displays various clothing articles of historic interest. Featuring some of Mary McConnell Borah's gowns from Washington, the display includes costumes from early-day Moscow as well.

I plan to construct other new exhibits soon. The present "Trapper's Cabin" will become a Latah County homesteader's cabin. Rustic furnishings of various types will be needed, including primitive kitchenwares, and household equipment which the first farmers might have brought with them or made on the site. Anyone wishing to donate or loan items for the period kitchen or homesteader's cabin may call the museum, 882-1004.

A special bicentennial exhibit is under construction. Photographs of several 4th of July celebrations in Latah County's past will be utilized, along with information pertaining to observance of the Fourth in days gone by.

The museum has received many objects recently, and the following are only a few of the most significant acquisitions. At the bequest of Mary Louise Perrine, Governor and Mrs. McConnell's sterling silver flatware now resides in the Mansion. It is Wallace Company's "Violet" pattern; one table setting is currently on display. Also donated from Mrs. Perrine's estate was an elegant half-round hardwood table. Originally the McConnell's, the table was later kept by Mary Borah for many years.

A beautiful three-piece parlor set now graces the front parlor of the Mansion. European in origin, the Louis XV style chairs and settee were the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Hoffman of Moscow.

In the garden of the McConnell Mansion are the beginnings of several historic rosebushes. Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Long

of Kendrick have donated plants and cuttings of an Austrian Copper rose, a pink moss rose, and a white moss rose. These roses are typical of the late nineteenth century garden, and these three specimens all came originally from pioneer homes in Latah County. Perhaps these could form a nucleus for a section of the museum grounds dedicated to the culture and display of roses from the period of the McConnell Mansion.

--Lee Magnuson

Financial Statement 6/18/76

Publications Fund	\$ 1,390.63
Oral History Fund	380.81
General Checking Account	<u>8,754.50</u>
Total	\$10,525.94

Savings Account at Bank of Idaho

Building Fund	\$ 292.38
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The general checking account includes the allowance from Latah County for the entire year.

--Leora Stillinger

Readers of the Bulletin should be aware of the important behind the scenes work done by Mr. and Mrs. Francis Nolini. Almost since the inception of this quarterly they have given of their time to assemble and staple the more than 300 copies and to attach the address labels. They also do the job of sorting according to zip code as required by the terms of our bulk mailing permit. This is the kind of valuable volunteer help that makes it possible to bring you news of the museum at minimum cost. Thank you, Ruth and Francis!



### New Publications

With the current burgeoning of interest in local history--accelerated, but not initiated, by the Bicentennial celebration--has come a quickening of interest in the preservation of historic buildings. Examples in Latah County are the acquisition by the City of Moscow of the old post office building and the efforts of the Fort Russell Neighborhood Organization to have part of Moscow's older residential area designated as a historic district. For those wishing to learn more about historic sites and buildings in the area two new publications are highly recommended.

Members of our Society will be especially interested in the Moscow-Latah County tour guide booklet which is being published by the local Bicentennial Commission and will soon be available. It is the result of months of effort by a committee of dedicated local history buffs headed by Cathy Rouyer. The guide outlines a total of thirteen tours, including five tours to all parts of the county, encompassing all the towns and villages. Five walking tours of Moscow are described--two of the downtown area, two of the residential districts, and one of the university campus. More unusual are a bike tour to Robinson Lake and a tour of sites which figure in the well-known books by Carol Ryrie Brink. Readers will find a discussion of the location of Indian trails and campgrounds as well as a basic introduction to local history, including a beginner's bibliography and a list of local historians who were interviewed in the process of preparing the guide. The paperbound booklet includes about forty pages of text, twenty photographs (some recent and others from collections of old pictures), and two fold-out maps.

In all, the tour guide gives locations of and historical information about more than 750 sites in Latah County, including such items as barns, homesteads, wells, opal and garnet deposits, and Indian campgrounds, in addition to homes and public buildings.

Copies may be obtained by calling or writing to Cathy Rouyer, 415 North Hayes, Moscow, Idaho 83843, phone

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882-5925. The price is \$2.75 locally or \$3.00 by mail. Because this is a limited edition, those interested in obtaining copies are urged not to delay getting in their orders.

A somewhat similar publication, much wider in scope, is Saints and Oddfellows: A Bicentennial Sampler of Idaho Architecture, by J. Meredith Neil, Executive Director of the Idaho Bicentennial Commission. The purpose of the book, to quote its introduction, is "to assist the growing number of travelers who would like to see and know a little about typical as well as outstanding buildings as they tour Idaho." It is not a definitive listing of important Idaho buildings, but rather, writes Dr. Neil, "a modest introduction to the fascinating story of Idaho architecture." Many of the structures pictured are old, but others are notable examples of recent architecture.

In addition to a photograph (maximum size  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " by  $3\frac{1}{4}$ " ) of each of the 302 buildings listed, there is on a facing page a descriptive paragraph explaining the historical significance of the structure as well as its present use. Latah County is represented by twenty-four buildings, most of them in Moscow. Only Boise has a greater number of listings.

✓ The volume is highly recommended for Idahoans who are interested in local history, particularly those who travel a good deal within the state. It is paperbound, 192 pages, available to Latah County residents at Bookpeople of Moscow. To order by mail, send \$4.07 (\$3.95 for those living outside Idaho) to Bookpeople of Moscow, 312 South Main Street, Moscow, Idaho 83843.

#### Museum Attendance Since March

April: 65 adults, 47 students

May: 154 adults, 150 students

June 1-17: 66 total



Report from the Oral History Project

The Oral History Project continues to be productive and has now amassed over 425 hours of recorded interviews. Karen Purtee has now completed a fourth booklet, "Carl Olson's Story," which is ready for distribution. We have received word that the salary of the director, Sam Schrager, will be funded through January under the Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA). The committee is also requesting of the county commissioners CETA funding of salary for an interview transcriber, to begin in the fall.

Several very gratifying developments this spring indicate the extent to which our project is being recognized as a model for the state. Historical societies in two northern counties, Clearwater and Bonner, have called on Sam for advice on setting up programs similar to ours. In April Sam was a speaker at the Pacific Northwest History Conference, the annual meeting of historians of the northwest region. His talk on oral social history was well received.

"A Future for the Small Town in Idaho" is the title for a series of two-day programs planned and carried out by the staff of Idaho Heritage magazine and funded by the Association for the Humanities in Idaho. Its purpose is to stimulate discussion among citizens of what they value in small-town life and what they wish their towns to be like in the future. From March through June the program has been taken to fourteen towns in the state; in each of these towns our tape-slide show has been a part of the program as an illustration of how oral history can be used to illuminate the past for the citizens of today.

For the north Idaho sessions Sam has been one of the resource persons, joining a team which includes such people as Arthur Hart of the State Historical Society, J. M. Neil of the Idaho Bicentennial Commission, and Floyd Decker of the Association of Idaho Cities. By the end of June Sam will have appeared with the team in Elk River, Juliaetta, Rathdrum, and Murray.

"Grassroots: An Oral History of the American People" is a newly-released series of tapes produced by the Visual Education Corporation of Princeton, N.J. According to the printed guide which supplements the tapes, more than twenty-four minutes of tape from our project have been selected for inclusion, along with tapes made by such well-known leaders in the field as George Korson, Austin and Alta Fife, Barre Tolkein, and Alan Lomax. Our project has been paid \$10 a minute for the use of our material.

--Lillian Otness, Project Chairman

### Time Capsule Proposed

Kenneth B. Platt has suggested a project which should be of interest to Museum Society members. In a letter to the Daily Idahonian he has proposed, as an appropriate bicentennial project, that a Latah County time capsule be prepared for opening in the year 2076. This could contain microfilm copies of such things as "representative newspapers, governmental agency proceedings, population statistics, agricultural statistics, assessed valuations of real property, a county land classification map showing current and proposed future uses; telephone and business directories, aerial maps of all towns, a road and railroad map plus telephone and telegraph lines, pipe lines, etc."

The letter continues the list of items to be microfilmed, including representative University of Idaho documents, scrapbooks of Latah County memorabilia, photographs of farm equipment and landscapes, and of typical farm and town dwellings, including interiors and furnishings. The list is not inclusive but is intended as a starter for discussion of what the capsule should contain so that the most suitable record of our past and present state may be preserved. Anyone having ideas on the subject is urged to communicate with Kenneth Platt.

Considerable interest has been generated by the proposal; already part of the money needed to finance it has been pledged.



Williamson's Store

by

Frank Williamson and Dick d'Easum

Farmers along the country road near Paradise Mountain were astonished by sights and sounds on a frosty morning a few days before Christmas. A four-horse bobsled with a peculiar cargo skimmed over the snow. Perched on the high seat, Nathaniel Williamson drove the team. Beside him rode Santa Claus with red suit and flowing beard. Behind them stood a decorated Christmas tree and an American flag. At the rear of the sleigh there was a crated piano. Bells jingled and spirited tunes played by a bugler and a drummer floated in the crisp air as the sled turned into the Jesse Cylear lane to deliver the piano as a surprise gift for Mrs. Cylear from her husband.

The method of delivery was not expected, but the surprise was nothing unusual for people who knew Williamson, proprietor of one of Moscow's largest general stores for many years early in the twentieth century. He was always up to something original in advancing the reputation of his business as "Your Store and Ours." During his career he put on fall fairs and contests, clogged streets with merchandise--for which he was arrested, to his glee at the advertising value--gave away ice cream cones, candy and watermelons, developed new methods of salesmanship, and revolutionized retail business in the northern part of the state where he took pride in his slogan: "Idaho's Price Maker and Pace Setter."

The main Williamson store for nearly a decade, beginning in 1913, was in a three-story building at First and Main Streets, built by Governor Wm. J. McConnell and in more recent times known as Thatuna Apartments. Williamson also had stores in many communities of the Palouse area in Idaho and Washington. He raised shorthorn cattle and was instrumental in establishing field peas as a crop for farmers. In addition, he owned a creamery and a natatorium where a generation of University of Idaho students did their swimming.

Nat Williamson was born in County Monaghan, Ireland. His early life on a small farm as the youngest son of a Protestant family in a Roman Catholic area was a battle for survival. His formal education was meager. As a young man he became an apprentice in a leather shop. He soon joined a firm of linen merchants with offices in Dublin and London. But the outlook was not promising. Williamson decided to test his wings in North America. He worked his way across the Atlantic on a cattle boat and got a job in Toronto. Then the Alaskan gold rush lured him to the West.

Arriving at Seattle on a day coach without berth or dinner, he found wages for store workers so attractive that he gave up his Alaskan plans and took a job with a retail firm, first as a clerk and then as floor walker, buyer and manager. While employed by McDougal-Southwick in Seattle he met Caroline Robinson, who was also working for that firm. They were married in 1899. He was put in charge of a store at Olympia and later at Bellingham. The young Irishman made friends easily and earned a reputation among wholesalers as a promising businessman.

An executive of Ely Walker Company of St. Louis encouraged Williamson to start his own store. Three places were available: Missoula, Walla Walla and Moscow. Williamson chose Moscow because of its opportunities as an aggressive town with a blossoming state university, the county seat and a population of solid citizens in the city and surrounding farms. He bought the stock of the Boston Store at Fifth and Main and started the first of his stores there in 1904, retaining the name of The Boston. From the start he let himself be known as "Moscow's Price Maker and Pace Setter"---a term he later expanded to include all of Idaho. He made liberal use of the slogan in advertising that he wrote himself.

Williamson was proud of the area he had chosen. The public returned the compliment. Customers from as far away as the Nez Perce prairie and Lewiston as well as nearer places such as Pullman, Palouse, Potlatch and Harvard went to Moscow to trade at his store. Business was brisk, particularly at special events he whooped up



for the Fourth of July, fall fairs and January white sales. Fairs at The Boston were the forerunner of the Latah County fair. He staged street parades, gave prizes for vegetables, flowers and horses, and conducted contests for old and young.

The store at Fifth and Main--the site now occupied by Cox and Nelson--was expanded to the entire block between Fourth and Fifth, except for the Shields building at Fourth and Main. The larger store became ~~the~~ Greater Boston. In addition, Williamson bought the Cloak Store, across from Hotel Moscow, and Grice's Furniture, where Carter's Drug is today. He sold both those businesses, disposing of mattresses, etc., by the boxcar load.

Space for the Greater Boston still being too small, he leased the McConnell building. He occupied all three floors, with furniture on top, ladies' wear, millinery and dressmaking on the second, and men's wear, dry goods and shoes on the first. The mezzanine accommodated an art department, china, offices and cashiers. Presently he leased part of an adjoining building and put in a restaurant on the upper level. He had a grocery and hardware store on the first floor. All units were connected to the main building by an archway on the first floor and a runway to the restaurant on the second. Families driving in from the country could shop for most of their needs and have meals without leaving the Williamson center.

He hung an electric sign saying "Williamson's" almost the full height of the building. The kaleidoscopic ornament on top was visible from the summit of Viola grade and became a landmark of Moscow. Williamson put in an elevator from basement to the third floor, advertising it as the first and finest in the district. He was not shy about saying he had the only store with a passenger elevator, the largest electric sign and the most complete stock of merchandise in Idaho north of Boise. And in moments when such modesty went out the window he conceded that he might be giving Boise the benefit of the doubt.

The store had an open well in the middle of the second and third floors. Each Christmas an evergreen tree was placed in the well. It reached from the first floor to the ceiling of the third. Williamson conducted contests as to its height, giving prizes to customers who guessed best, after qualifying, of course, by buying something.

He made two buying trips to England and Ireland (narrowly missing passage on the Titanic on one of them) to obtain linens and laces and many other old-country treasures to delight British and Irish people of the Moscow area. On several occasions he hired Scotch bagpipe and drum corps for parades on Main Street and concerts in the store.

Every Saturday he sent a messenger on horseback along the main roads to Moscow with a batch of flyers proclaiming bargains and informing one and all that farm produce such as eggs, butter and potatoes would bring the highest trading prices at Williamson's. Sometimes he had riders, such as Tom Myklebust, galloping about the country describing fabulous buys whether or not a sale was in progress. However, there was nearly always a "special" of some sort at Williamson's. The proprietor regarded it as a day lost when he did not whip up some sort of colossal offer.

The arrest of Williamson for blocking the sidewalk happened while he was operating the Boston and selling off goods from the Grice store. He had piles of stuff on the street. Police took a dim view. Williamson paid a fine for obstructing pedestrians. The next issue of the Moscow Mirror carried the ad: "Williamson arrested. Hounded and harassed on every hand by the merchants of Moscow because he dared to lower prices of merchandise to the people of Moscow and surrounding area." The ad went on to quote several prices. A sign on a stack of mattresses still in the street but not offending the law carried this message: "Call the police. Don't steal ideas."

During peak years of the Moscow store, Williamson had an arrangement with railroads serving the vicinity whereby



women got round-trip passes validated by appearance at a "Williamson march." The marches were sales. Most of the women bought something. The proposition was deemed good for customers, the store, and the railroads.

When big shipments of goods arrived by train from Spokane, Williamson made a parade of the delivery by horse-drawn wagons from depot to store. Scores of drays filled the street, carrying banners about bargains. Bands tooted and kids trooped along popping firecrackers.

Printed advertising in the Williamson style was flamboyant. An eight-page broadside for a white fair in 1911 at the Greater Boston said, for example:

"We have 2321 miles of Swiss and cambric embroideries, values from 8 cents to 22 cents per yard at choice to all comers for a nickel; 1766 miles--'Irish measure,' which, by the way is over 2000 miles statute--fine Nainsook and cambric embroideries, values 35 to 40 cents, at choice during the fair for a dime; 87 miles excellent corset cover and flouncing embroideries, fine, even threads, round finishes, double-worked patterns. This lot at the uniform price, choice of all widths from 15 to 27 inches for 29 cents a yard.

"What other mercantile institution, even in Spokane, could fill or show an eighth of a mile of spotless white goods at one time? None. We will do it. If you doubt it, bring your tape line and you will find our claim is less than the space claimed.

"We set the pace and make the price on everything. No graft played, but fearless, determined merchandising at a lower price. A better store, a better stock to get the business. And we do. It is this store and this store alone that has made Moscow the best trading town in the Palouse. There are 100 salespeople to wait on you. One continuous floor an eighth of a mile from one point to another filled to overflowing with white goods of every class and description, embracing the richest and rarest goods to be found on the continent of Europe as well as America.

"This is the most remarkable page as regards cold-blooded price slashing we have every reason to believe was ever printed.

"Seven years of underselling and underbuying has increased this store's sales step by step until we are today conceded by all to be the biggest distributors in the state. The plan adopted by us seven years ago has practically cut off the catalogue houses of the East in this section. Big sales and small profits. And cash at both ends is the most important item in making this store what it is today--the biggest in the state. This is the most colossal merchandise event in trade annals."

During the first three days of the sale a five-piece orchestra "rendered late selections." Professor Burt, "the world's lightning artist," gave demonstrations in a store window. One of his paintings was given away with each \$10 purchase.

In several of his ads through the years Williamson delighted in saying: "Ask other merchants if they like Williamson and why not."

His skill as a salesman is illustrated by a betting incident. Williamson and Dr. C. L. Gritman wagered a hat on a local election. Dr. Gritman won. After he collected his bet he told friends: "That was the most expensive hat a man ever won. N.W. sold me a fur coat, linens for Mrs. Gritman, a new suit, shoes, and lap robes for the car. That damn free hat cost me close to \$1000."

Williamson nearly always ate lunch at home. Many times he went to the hitch rack behind the store and picked out the horse of a customer. One day he took a strange horse. When he got back after lunch the owner was waiting with the sheriff. It took a lot of explaining and a pair of new boots to clear up the mistake.

When he opened a branch in Palouse, about 1907, horses were the best means of travel. After closing the Moscow store on Saturday nights, Williamson would ride to Palouse, check merchandise, lay out work for the manager, and ride back on Sunday. One rainy Saturday he hired a



horse from the livery stable on Sixth Street where Johnnie's Cafe now stands. The road at that time went out Main and turned at the old harvester plant about where Rosauer's is today.

The horse Williamson rode was reluctant. At about the site of the Gub Mix home the horse refused to budge another inch. Williamson carried a revolver because he frequently took considerable cash from one store to another. He leveled the gun above the horse's ears and fired. The steed took off like a rocket and ran to Palouse in record time with Williamson hanging on for his life.

During World War I, N.W. led several bond drives, and because his oldest son, Jack, was serving in France he regularly published letters from the front. Also during the war, Williamson touched off a bonfire at First and Main fueled, according to his ads, by all the merchandise in the store marked, "Made in Germany."

On trips East to buy goods, the merchant often stopped off in Chicago and took side trips into Iowa, where the farms fascinated him. He admired the white fences around layouts of cattle, beautiful homes and large barns. He bought land around Moscow, Pullman and Palouse to set up similar farmsteads. Development of the rural scene coincided with his sale of the main store at Moscow. His lease on the McConnell building ended in 1920. He closed out with a typical "gigantic" sale. The building was vacant until it was remodeled into apartments in 1928. Parts of the building are occupied today by stores and offices. Although the largest of the Williamson stores was closed, several outlying stores he started continued in business many more years. He had branches in such places as Winchester, Gifford and Bovill in Idaho and at Heppner, Oregon. They were turned over to managers he trained.

After shutting the Moscow store, Williamson directed his farm ventures from an office on Second Street. He bought more land near Moscow and a couple of farms at Genesee. Shorthorn cattle were his particular fancy. He bought two carloads of cows and a purebred bull in Chicago,

brought them to a farm near Moscow and attempted to create a typical Iowa setting. On the acreage that is now the University of Idaho dairy research center he built a large cattle barn and a silo. Then he constructed a hog house for Duroc Jerseys. All buildings and fences were painted white. Williamson was assisted in his livestock development by Prof. C. W. Hickman, head of the animal husbandry department, and other members of the university staff. As an organizer of the Shorthorn Association he was closely associated with other breeders of that kind of beef. The purebred promotion was a little ahead of its time. The area was not yet geared to the program. Pedigreed stock was unprofitable, but Williamson kept most of his herd. On several occasions Bernice Day, Helen Parsons and Mary Williamson drove the cattle from Moscow to pasture on the Palouse farm or on Moscow Mountain, riding horses cowboy style on the several-day jaunts.

In keeping with old-country practice, Williamson named his farms. Two had Irish flavor. The one northwest of Moscow--later the University of Idaho research center--was "Ennis Fallen." The place southeast of town--now owned by Wesley Johnston--was "Drumore." Northwest of town was the "Westcott Place"--now the Nearing farm. And northwest of Palouse was the farm called "Farview."

While he was buying cattle and running farms Williamson established a creamery on Sixth Street near the university campus in a building that had been an apple packing house. The creamery collected milk on a truck route that went as far as the top of Lewiston grade. It made butter and ice cream and supplied cream to many Moscow places. It introduced Eskimo pies to the district and sold all the buttermilk you could drink for a nickel. Part of the creamery was made into a natatorium that was used by university and Moscow people for many years. The property has since become a trucking depot.

As a farmer-stockman-creamery operator, Williamson continued his enthusiasm for field peas. He had advocated the crop while he was a merchant and continued to boost the crop by helping farmers obtain seed and improve their cultural practices for more rewarding yields.



Economic conditions were rough on farming in the early 1920's. Prices for livestock and crops were discouraging. Williamson went back to retailing while he kept on operating some of his farms. He started several stores throughout the district in association with local managers, several of whom got their business start from Williamson in launching out on their own.

In 1921 he reorganized a store in Palouse with James Williamson, a nephew, as manager. Two sisters-in-law, Mabel and Pearl Robinson, were on the staff. The corporation liquidated in 1946 after a fire. A son, Frank Williamson, and nephew James then resumed the business as a partnership that continued until 1970 when they retired.

The Williamson store at Winchester was managed by Charles Stevens, who eventually bought it. The Bovill store was sold to a member of the Grice family that had been in business at Moscow. Stock of the Heppner, Oregon, store was moved to Moscow. A store at Helmer was transferred to Orofino in 1925 with Otto Hagedorn and Frank Williamson as managers. Then the Orofino business was moved to Troy, where Frank Williamson operated it until it closed in 1933 and Frank became a partner in the Palouse store.

N.W. Williamson died in 1928. His widow died in 1941. They had three sons and a daughter. Jack, an engineer, died in 1953 in Texas, where he had a marine equipment business. Frank, who operated several stores in the Williamson group, lives in retirement at Palouse and at a summer home at Conkling Park. Harry was killed in an auto accident in California in 1938. Mary Williamson d'Easum lives in Boise.

There is no Williamson store in Moscow today, but lettering on the side of the McConnell building still proclaims in durable paint, "Williamson's, Your Store and Ours." It sustains memories of "Idaho's Price Maker and Pace Setter."

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### Bicentennial Reception Planned

Plans are nearing completion for a Bicentennial reception honoring senior citizens. Set for the afternoon of Tuesday, July 6, in the garden of the McConnell Mansion, refreshments will be served and musical entertainment presented. The museum will be open for viewing by the guests. Donning of historic costumes for the event is encouraged. The Historical Club has graciously volunteered to provide hostesses for the occasion. The reception will begin at 2:00 p.m. and last until 5:00 p.m., July 6, 1976.