
LATAH LEGACY

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE LATAH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



in this issue

PALOUSE HOLIDAYS



"DECK THE HALLS"

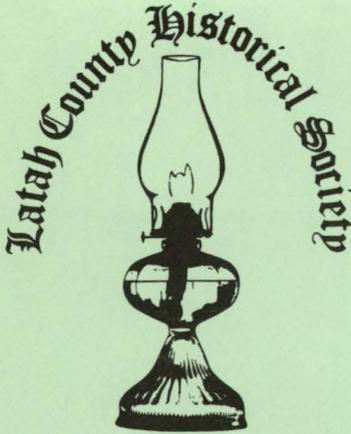
HISTORY OF THE LATAH COUNTY FAIR

IN MEMORY OF CAROL RYRIE BRINK

FALL, 1981

\$1.50

Published quarterly by the Latah County Historical Society, 110 S. Adams, Moscow, Idaho 83843. Subscriptions included in annual membership dues



Volume 10, Number 3

Fall 1981

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TIM MALARCHICK is an undergraduate American Studies student at the University of Idaho. He used the Latah County Historical Society oral history collection and collected personal interviews about holiday celebration throughout the county. MALARCHICK hopes to enroll in law school after completion of undergraduate studies.

THE MOUNTAIN VIEW 4-H CLUB wrote a history of the Latah County Fair as part of a 1976 Bicentennial Project about early county fairs. A historical brochure was published with this information in 1976.

KIT FREUDENBERG is the new director of the Latah County Historical Society. She is interested in using cultural folkways and historical objects in the interpretation of history.

Recent work and research about Carol Ryrie Brink has been done by MARY REED, a volunteer at the Latah County Historical Society and a historical consultant based in Pullman, Washington. With funding from the Association for the Humanities in Idaho, Ms. REED was able to interview Mrs. Brink prior to her death this summer and has been working on an exhibit and publication for the Historical Society.

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Cover photo: Granddad Vogul's team, Winter ca. 1916
LCHS collection



PALOUSE HOLIDAYS

by

Tim Malarchick

(edited by Kit Freudenberg)

The importance of holidays to Palouse families has remained very strong and definite. In the past, holidays were not only a time to celebrate the seasonal changes or the birth of Christ, but also a celebration of the strength of the family. These families were constantly busy, but when the seasons brought a holiday, they would slow down, sit down, and enjoy each other's company as much as they enjoyed each other's helping hands. Holidays were often the main point in unifying the family and refocusing family members' attention on that unity.

The community was dependent on those holidays as much as the family. The community unified as a family during holiday celebrations. However, family and community

roles have changed. Holiday celebrations have changed. Several holidays have disappeared entirely or have been forgotten partially.

Christmas was the single biggest holiday in the family during the early 1900s and has remained so today. Every Christmas was marked by at least one school play and one church play put on by the community's children, telling the story of the birth of Baby Jesus. After these programs, fruit, candy, and nuts were handed out to all the children present by Santa Claus. At home, Christmas trees were usually put up and in one instance, when an evergreen tree could not be found, a giant sagebrush filled in.¹ The trees were decorated with long paper chains and

strings of popcorn. Usually the top was decorated with a piece of foil shaped into a star. Somewhere the children were sure to have hung up their stockings. Presents were placed under the tree after the children were off to sleep. The women of the family worked long and hard baking and preparing for the big dinner on Christmas Day. On that morning, the presents were exchanged and the children would play with their new treasures until the huge feast prepared and guaranteed to entice all to eat too much.²

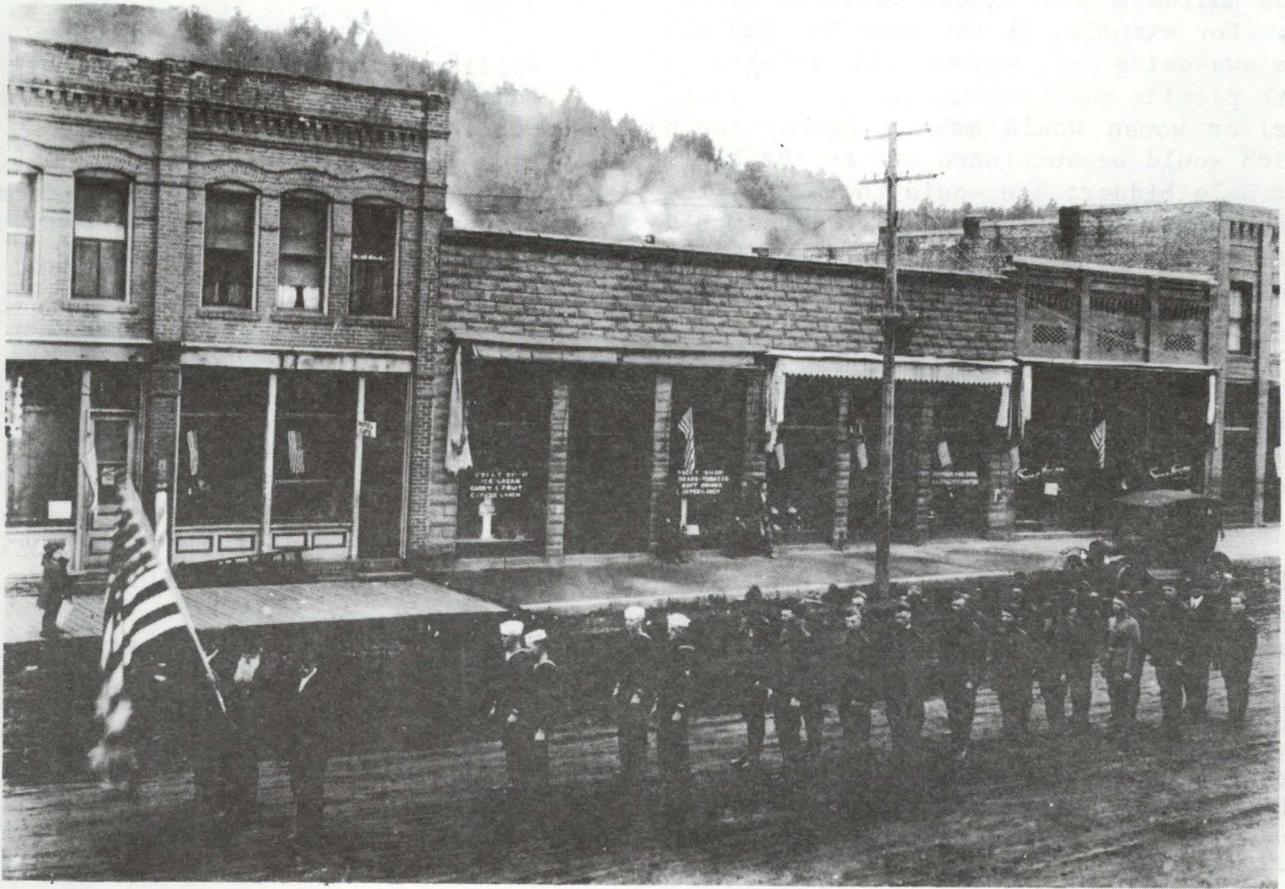
Thanksgiving was the most meaningful holiday for many families because it centered on the family as a close-knit unit. Few distractions could be found and this holiday was usually a quiet, serene time to enjoy each other's company.³

Halloween was the perfect time for pranks and many were perpetrated. Some common ones were knocking over outhouses and, for those with patience and mechanical ability, the dismantling of a buggy or other light vehicle only to reassemble it astride a barn or house with two wheels sitting on either side of the roof.⁴ Trick-or-treating was not a common part of Halloween festivities in the early 1900s because of the lengthy distances between houses and farms.

Valentine's Day revolved around the youngsters and those "eternally in love." At school, children cut up, pasted, and made their own valentines which would be passed out by the teacher at a party during the afternoon.⁵

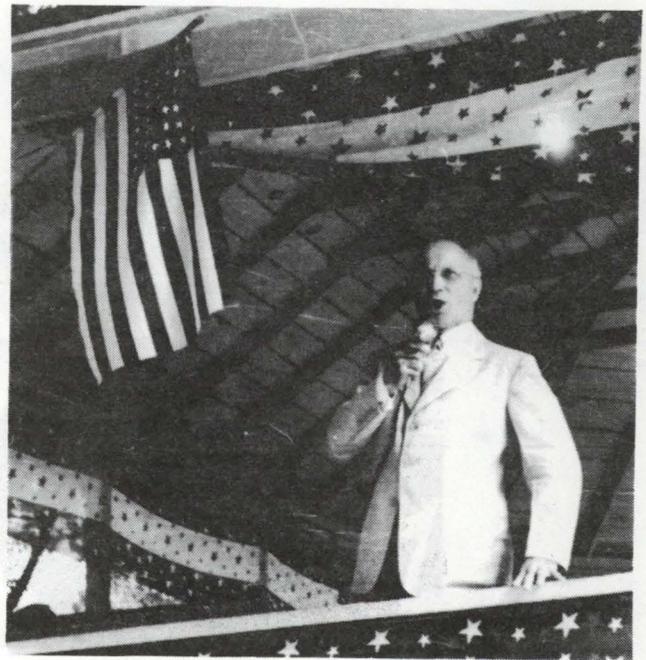


Moscow Fourth of July Celebration: Fat Men's Race, 1911. LCHS Collection.



Armistice Day, Troy, 1918.
LCHS collection.

Holiday celebrations have changed, however, and the reason for celebration has been lost. One such holiday is the Fourth of July. It has gone from wide-community popularity to a state today in which few people remember its purpose of celebrating the independent nation and the Revolutionary War. Fourth of July celebrations of the early 1900s often included a giant community picnic, a band playing in the town park, bunting and banners decorating the entire town, a gun salute by local townspeople, and fireworks at the end of the day's festivities. People would drive into Moscow from as far away as Uniontown.⁶



Burton L. French, Congressman
1st District, Idaho.
LCHS collection

Some holidays have almost vanished totally. For example, in the past May Day was the awakening of summer and celebrated with picnics and a basket social. A young girl or woman would make a basket lunch which would be auctioned off to the highest male bidder; she would then share the lunch with that gentleman.⁷ There would also be a May Pole dance with young women dressed in white summer dresses. The May Pole activities were traditionally centered on the University of Idaho campus. Another May Day tradition was the May basket. A small basket of flowers would be placed on the porch or doorstep of "someone special."⁸

Holidays and celebrations have remained a very important part of lifestyles and traditions of today's Palouse families. Perhaps the best way to sum up the importance of holidays today and yesterday is to ask someone who has seen both. According to Nora Callison of Kendrick, "The holidays will never change for my family. They are a special part of what my family is--together."⁹

Footnotes

1. William Kauder, interviewed by Rob Moore, interview #1, Oral History Collection, LCHS.
2. Private interview with Louis Hermon, Moscow, April 1980.
3. Ibid.
4. Clarice M. Sampson, interviewed by Laura Schrage, interview #4, Oral History Collection, LCHS.
5. Hermon interview.
6. Private interview with Chris Scharnhorst, Moscow, April 1980.
7. Helena C. Carlson, interviewed by Karen Purtee, interview #2, Oral History Collection, LCHS.
8. Private interview with Marvin Long, Kendrick, April 1980.
9. Private interview with Nora Callison, Kendrick, April 1980.



May Day celebration at Elk River School, 1920.
Catholic church on the hilltop.
Original photograph from J. Clark, Lewiston.

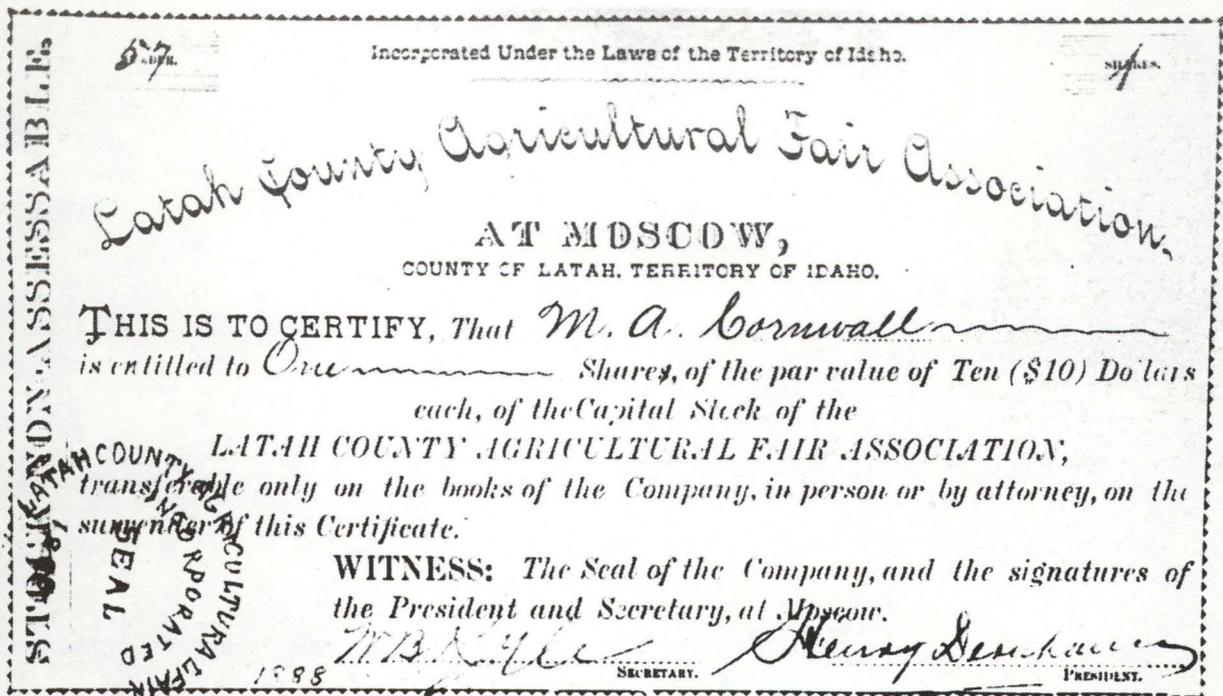
HISTORY OF THE LATAH COUNTY FAIR

by
The Mountain View 4-H Club

[Editor's Note: The following is an article written as part of a 1976 Bicentennial project by the Mountain View 4-H Club.]

Local fairs in Latah County can be traced back to 1888. In 1888 Mason A. Cornwall, an early pioneer, provided the leadership to incorporate the Latah County Agricultural Fair Association. The Association was incorporated under the laws of the Territory of Idaho. From 1888 to 1904 a number of small community fairs or days were held each year in the county.

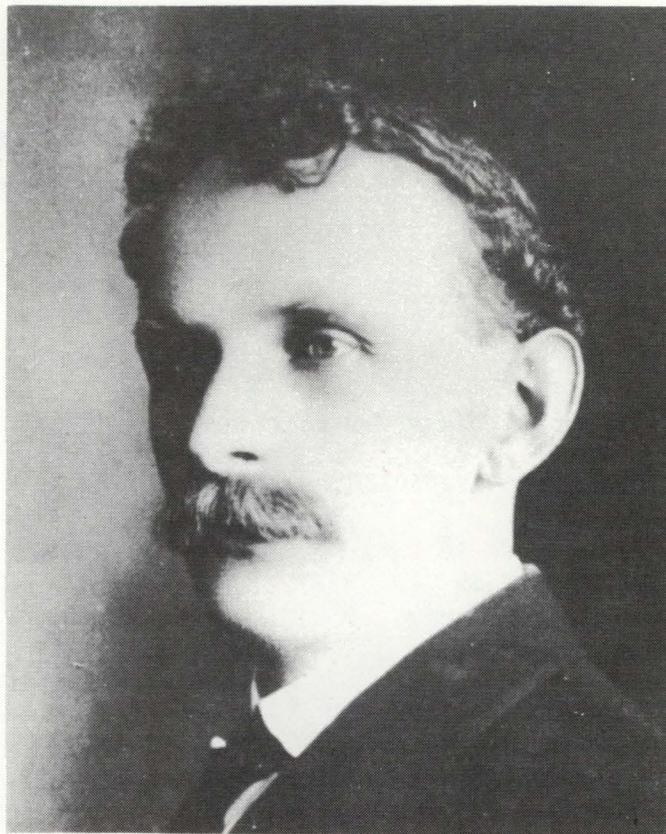
In 1904 Nathaniel Williamson, a local Moscow businessman, sponsored the first Williamson's Great Fall Fair. Williamson was the owner of the Greater Boston Store located at the present site of Cox and Nelson. Williamson gained local fame by being arrested three times in one week for blocking the sidewalk in front of his store with a large shipment of mattresses. Williamson sponsored the Great Fall Fair until 1909. Exhibits included farm produce and livestock. The produce was exhibited in a tent located at the present



Stock certificate for the Latah County Agricultural Fair Association. Issued in 1888 to M.A. Cornwall. LCHS collection.

site of Hoyt's Sandwich Plus. Horses were exhibited on Main Street in Moscow in front of the store. Prizes for the best produce exhibits included handbags, pants, clothes wringers, overcoats and lace curtains. Prizes for livestock included Stetson hats and overcoats. The store believed strongly in civic promotions doing much to advance the cause of agricultural fairs, horses shows, and livestock showing and sales during this period. The value of good publicity was endorsed and the company did much, outside of business interests, to achieve the notice and attention of Latah County.

Williamson and other county businessmen and leaders sponsored the first Latah County Fair in 1910. The Moscow Chamber of Commerce played a leading role in the organization of the fair. Many communities such as Kendrick, Deary, and Princeton held local fairs just prior to the county fair during this period. In 1910 Kendrick won the Trophy Cup for the outstanding community exhibit. The fair received strong support until 1919.



Nathaniel Williamson.
LCHS collection.



The Greater Boston Store Horse Show, Moscow, 1908.
LCHS collection.



Fair Days, Deary, date unknown. LCHS collection.

Outstanding displays of farm produce and livestock characterized these early fairs. One of the outstanding events at the fair was the baby judging contest. First prize was \$100. Horse races were a highlight of the day. Purses of \$300 went to the winner. The fairs were started off with a parade. Concerts were provided by local bands. Commercial exhibits were a strong feature of these early fairs.

In 1915 the Daily Star Mirror reported that one could get a first class meal for 25¢. The same year N. Peterson had a booth on the grounds showing his anti-freezing and combination toilet flushing tanks. The Idaho National Harvester Company exhibited threshing machines made in Moscow. Crowds totaled as high as 3,000 people for one day's attendance.

The opening day of the 1915 fair was termed a record breaker by the local paper. The paper reported that two thousand children thrilled the crowd by singing America. Excitement prevailed several years later when a local official embezzled an unknown quantity of fair funds.

By 1920 interest and sponsorship in the fair had declined. J. F. Papineau, a local rancher, expressed disappointment in the failure to have one. Local communities continued to have fairs. The Troy Fair in 1920 featured a 16 piece jazz band. U.S. Senator Nugent and other politicians spoke at the fair. Many young farmers attended fairs in Garfield and Spokane. Earl Clyde won two prizes at the Spokane Fair with his pigs.



Fair Day, Troy, 1920. Jack Pickerd, undertaker, had his business in the lower section of the Hotel Troy. From left to right: Jenson, Cecil Emmet, Bauge Dyer, unknown, unknown, Ed Solberg, unknown, Alfred Christie, Hoyt, John Phelan, Walt Arneberg, unknown, Paul Rudeen, C. Larson, Art Flint, and Bert Campbell. Site now occupied by Troy Tractor Company. LCHS collection.

In 1925 a Latah County Day was designated at the Whitman County Fair and Garfield Fair. The Latah County 4-H livestock team took first place at the Lewis County Fair. A smaller version of the local fair was held and featured a style review and livestock judging contest. 4-H work was recognized in terms of participation in fairs in surrounding counties during the twenties and early thirties.

In 1935 the Grange and the Veterans of Foreign Wars sponsored a Fall Festival. Over 1,000 items were displayed. A major feature of the festival was a pet parade. A mysterious girl who entered two pigs in the pet parade won first prize, but she disappeared before the judges could give her a prize.

The third fair was finally set up under state statutes and state financial aid was obtained. In 1941 the annual report from the County Agent's Office states: "Exhibitors and visitors indicated that definite progress has been made from year to year on both quality and numbers of exhibits. The Fair offers an opportunity for both 4H'ers and FFA members to exhibit their projects which increases their individual interest. It is believed that the results of the Fair have been one of the principal factors in developing an appreciation among adults for better quality livestock and crops." In 1941 two additional buildings both 40 x 80 feet were erected.

There were no fairs between the years of

1942 and 1944 because of the war. The fair has continued since 1945. The present property upon which the fair buildings are now standing was bought in 1955. Many people criticized the purchase. They said it was too far out of town and that simply would not draw people. The present 4-H building was built in 1975 especially for the exhibits of the clubs which have grown immensely in size and stature. Attendance of 15,000 people in 1975 indicates continued and growing interest in the fair. Fairs from 1955 through the sixties featured parades, style reviews, demonstrations, Miss Latah County Fair Queen Contests, talent shows, and many other events. Excitement was generated in the 1950 fair when a 200 pound bear escaped and tore down many of the exhibits. In one escapade two racoons escaped from their cages and ate all of the eggs and meat supplies in the Grange Food Booth.

In 1937, with the popularity of the fall festival, plans were made to organize the "first" official Latah County Fair. The 4-H'ers had three major activities which could be incorporated into the fair--the Junior Livestock Show in Spokane, the County Achievement Day, and the District Style Review. In 1937 a group of farmers from communities in the county visited various county fairs and became interested in organizing a fair. In 1938 the first fair was financed by advertising subscriptions in the premium book. Approximately 150 head of livestock were exhibited. A Board of Directors was organized at this point.

According to Homer Futter, a former Extension Agent who was on the first board, the first fair was held where Chormley Park and West Park School are now located. It was the National Guard's land and use was made of the cavalry barns for animals. A building was erected with WPA help to house exhibits. In 1940 a circus tent was erected by volunteers. Mr. Futter commented on the humor involved in trying to set up this large canvas monster. A young heifer on a float accidentally un-

loaded into the back seat of a white convertible. Mr. Futter spent most of the afternoon cleaning up the car.

The fair has served as a unifying force in the county over the years in stimulating agricultural and livestock development. It has provided a setting where the young of the county can display the work of their efforts. One of the secrets of the success of the fair has been the local control of Latah citizens. One cannot predict what changes the future will bring to the fair; however, the fair will continue to serve as an important agricultural, social, and cultural event deemed of great value by its citizens. 

Moscow people have the name of being very modest. It is said that young girls of that city retire from company to change their minds. Furthermore it is said that Moscow people will not sprinkle their lawns until after dark lest the passer-by might see their hose, and the newspapers blush when they tell the naked truth. When speaking of a table leg they say "limb on a table." A young man from Pullman visiting Moscow friends one evening attended a festival, and while there a large dog having attracted the attention of all, the Pullman young man said, "How short that dog's pants are!" Nine young ladies within hearing fainted. --Vollmer Vedette

The above concerning the Moscow girls is nothing compared to what a Mirror representative witnessed while in Vollmer recently. Two young ladies were going down the principal street when they discovered some undressed lumber: one fainted and the other has had fits when she opens her eyes ever since.

Moscow Mirror
9 October 1891, p. 4



Title page from Kris Kringle's Christmas Tree,
a popular children's book published in 1845
by E. Ferrett and Company. "History News," 1980.

"DECK THE HALLS"

by
Kit Freudenberg

As early as 1747, the Moravians in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, set up "Christmas trees." These were actually evergreen branches attached to wooden pyramids. Earliest references to the tree itself appeared in the 1820s. The custom of Christmas trees spread wherever German immigrants settled.

A German immigrant living in Boston decorated a Christmas tree for his son in 1832. A tree was set up in Illinois in 1832, but because evergreens were not available, a sassafras tree was decorated instead. And by 1846, the Christmas tree custom had spread to Texas.

In 1850, "Godey's Lady's Book," a popular magazine, published a print of Queen Victoria and her family gathered around their Christmas tree. This print helped popularize the Christmas tree in the United States.

The Dutch immigrants in the New York area started decorating trees about this time as New Year's trees. The first known erection of a tree in an American church took place in 1851 in Cleveland, Ohio. By 1862, the Christmas tree was considered customary in San Francisco. The European style of table-top trees gave way to the American floor-to-ceiling ones. A family who did not set up a tree within the home could still enjoy the church's or school's community tree.

Dolls, fruits, paper cornucopias, gilded egg shells, candy and candles, seed pods, ribbons, and pine cones decorated Christmas trees in America. The most important ornaments, however, were the presents

themselves that were tied to the tree branches.

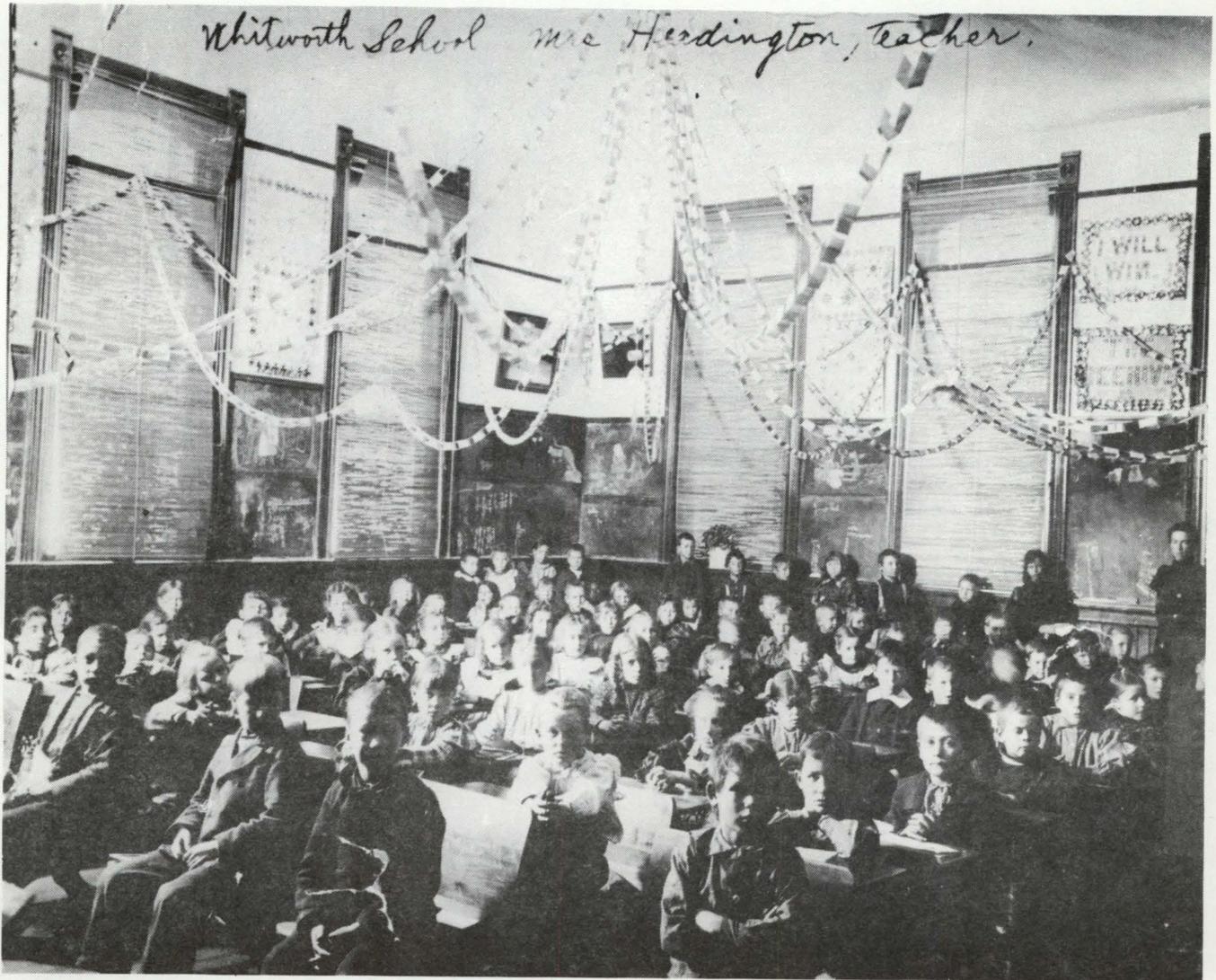
Throughout the years, ornaments changed with style and fashion. Some, like icicles and glass balls, have remained an American tradition. Several period ornaments were fans, pin cushions, flags, paper flowers, little boxes, lace bonbon bags, scrap pictures, ships, balloons, bird cages and nests, paper shoes to hold tiny gifts, mottoes cut from paper, bead or gilt paper stars, and baskets.

Fruit and nuts of all kinds were waxed and sprinkled with glitter. Apples and walnuts were popular decorations. A scooped-out orange peel formed a candy basket. Seed pods and pine cones dusted with glitter or sparkles decorated trees throughout the 19th century.

Cookies, either in animal or simple geometric shapes and sometimes sprinkled with sugar, adorned the trees. Gingerbread and sugar cookies were used during the 1800s, and occasionally magazine pictures were pasted on them.

Bonbon boxes were cut from watercolor paper into shapes of drums, stars, crescents, and diamonds to hold sugar plums and candies. The form was then covered with scrap paper, watercolor paper, lace, or ribbon.

About 1860, the first glass balls were imported from Germany. The United States began manufacturing them in the early 1870s. These were very rare and bought singly as collector items.



Whitworth School ca. 1900.
Mrs. Headinton, teacher.
LCHS collection.

Ornamental cones, called cornucopias, came in all sizes from small ornamental to large ones filled with nuts, fruit, and candy. Two popular styles had ribbons banded on top with a picture pasted on one side or ribbons banded in a spiral fashion around the side. The more elaborate cornucopias were trimmed with lace and tassels. Paper chains, like cornucopias, were among the earliest decorations. In 1880s women's magazines, chains were pictured made from glazed or foil paper cut into half-inch by three-inch bands. The described floor-to-ceiling trees needed chains at least fifteen to twenty feet long. Popcorn strings appeared by the 1860s and green or red dyed popcorn balls became popular about 1900.

Common tree ornaments then were dolls. Inexpensive wax, rag, or wire frame dolls were covered with fabric scraps for clothing. A strip of fabric and a paper face could be attached to a cardboard body with wire arms. Crepe-paper dolls with paper heads and limbs were available on store-bought cut-out sheets in the 1890s.

One of the first ornaments that could be purchased for a tree was the reflector. These were pressed into multi-facets on tin pieces and suspended behind the candles on the tree. Electric lights were first used on a Christmas tree in New York City in 1882. Due to the extremely high cost, they were only found in the wealthier homes until well into the 20th century.

Using paper, paste, patience and a little imagination, you can make several of these Victorian Christmas decorations for your own tree. 

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Schorer, Laura Lynn, "Christmas Past," History News, Vol. 35 #12, December 1980.



"Gathering Christmas Greens,"
an illustration ca. 1876.

IN MEMORY OF CAROL RYRIE BRINK

by
Mary Reed



Mrs. Brink at her desk.
Estate of Carol Ryrie Brink.

Although the death of Carol Ryrie Brink on August 15 marks the loss of a personal link with Latah County's past, we are fortunate that she has left us a rich legacy of her writings and memories. We who associate Carol with the colorful history of these Idaho mountains and fields and of Moscow, perhaps forget that her Idaho years were a prelude to a rich and happy life that spanned 85 years. Yet we are justified in claiming Carol as our own because her writings are so closely associated with us. Just a month before her death, Carol reminisced about the importance of her Idaho roots, and how her early years had made the strongest impression upon her later life.

Carol was born December 28, 1895, the breath of life blown into her by her robust and prominent grandfather, Dr. William W. Watkins. Her mother Henrietta was an accomplished pianist, beautiful and temperamental. Alex Ryrie, her father, was a young Scottish immigrant who became one of Moscow's first mayors and helped survey the streets of the young town. Carol's childhood, interwoven with the history of Moscow, was marked with tragedy, a situation which she remarked, "can either make a child a genius or a criminal, but I fell somewhere in between." These misfortunes included her father's death in 1900, the murder of Dr. Watkins in 1901, and her mother's suicide in 1904.



Ballet

Four Girls On A Homestead.
Estate of Carol Ryrie Brink.

Fortunately Carol found a secure refuge with her grandmother and Aunt Elsie; and, although she was a lonely child, she remembers her childhood as full of happiness and friendships. Loneliness sharpened her perceptions of the interesting mixture of people in Moscow and the beautiful countryside. On long pony rides into the Idaho hills, Carol made up stories for her own amusement, inspired by the stories her grandmother and aunt told. Gram Watkins and Aunt Elsie always assumed that this girl would some day be an author. It was only later after she left Idaho in 1917 that Carol realized the stories she had grown up with in Moscow were as exciting and interesting as any she had read in books.

The first fruits of her childhood memories were written for children, notably Caddie Woodlawn, which was based on the experiences of her grandmother's childhood in pioneer Wisconsin. The first of her three adult, Idaho novels, Buffalo Coat, appeared in 1944. The second and third were Snow in the River and Strangers in the Forest, completing the semi-autobiographical trilogy of her grandparents, mother, father, and uncles, and Elsie Phiel who had a timber homestead in Clearwater County.

Carol received numerous awards and recognition. Caddie Woodlawn was awarded the prestigious Newberry Medal in 1934, later translated into several languages, and inspired the state of Wisconsin to establish a historical park around "Caddie's" pioneer home.

But beside the loss of an Idaho author, we mourn the passing of a very warm, gracious, and gentle woman. Carol remained active throughout her life, whether with her family at their summer cottage in Wisconsin, among her friends in Minnesota where her husband taught for many years at the University, or with her newer friends in Southern California. After her husband's death in 1973 Carol maintained a full and active life at Wesley Palms in San Diego, a retirement community that profited from her enthusiasm and good nature. Although Carol declared her career as a novelist to be over (she was determined not to become a prima donna who didn't know when to leave the stage), she continued writing poetry, keeping a journal, and painting with her friends. Just last June, Carol and a friend participated in an elderhostel program in New Hampshire.



CHARLOTTE, LUCILE, CATHERINE, CAROL

Charlotte Lewis, Lucile Watkins,
Catherine Frantz, and Carol.
Estate of Carol Ryrie Brink.



Four Generations : (left to right) Gram Watkins and Aunt Elsie Phiel, Carol Brink and Nora Brink Hunter seated. Estate of Carol Ryrie Brink.

Carol Brink's death this August seemed sudden to many of us because of her active life, which reflects her determination to live as completely and joyfully as possible each day. We in Idaho join all those

faraway friends of Carol's who treasured her friendship and were touched by the wisdom, the good humour, and the warmth and breadth of life in her writings. 

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LATAH COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
110 South Adams St.
Moscow, Idaho 83843

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In 1968 interested individuals organized the Latah County Historical Society to collect and preserve materials connected with the history of Latah County and to provide further knowledge of the history and tradition of the area. Every person, young or old, who is interested in the history of Latah County and who would like to assist in its preservation and interpretation is cordially invited to become a member. Subscription to this journal and a discount on books published by the Society are included in membership dues. Dues for the various classes of membership are as follows:

	Friend	Contributing	Sustaining	Sponsoring	Benefactor
Individual	\$ 5-10	\$11-25	\$26- 50	\$ 51-100	\$101-499
Family	9-15	16-40	41-100	101-200	201-499
Business	25-35	36-75	76-150	151-300	301-499

A "500 Club" is reserved for contributions of \$500 or more. Privileges are identical for all classes; the higher dues represent a much needed donation to help the Society's work. Dues are tax deductible.

The Society's services include conducting oral histories, publishing local history monographs, maintaining a local history/genealogy research library and the county museum, as well as educational outreach. The Society wishes to acquire objects, documents, books, photographs, diaries, and other materials relating to the history of Latah County. These are added to the collections and made available to researchers while they are preserved for future generations.

The Society is housed in the William J. McConnell Mansion, 110 South Adams, Moscow. The museum is open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. Visits to the museum or research library are welcomed at other times and can be arranged by calling (208) 882-1004.