

LATAH COUNTY MUSEUM SOCIETY

McConnell Mansion 110 South Adams

Moscow, Idaho

Quarterly Bulletin

Lillian Otness, Interim Editor

Volume 4, No. 2

April, 1975

THE NEW YEAR IS UNDER WAY

A Message from the Society President

In an organization such as this there is seldom a lack of new ideas, or renewal of old. The problems we encounter concern personnel and funds to expedite them plus a lot of work on someone's part to carry them out. Some committee reorganization has been made, some being dropped and others added to keep abreast of the ever-changing situations we meet. Most committee chairmen are now at work, and others will be soon. The ranks will be filled as willing participants can be located. We will try to find space to publish the complete committee makeup in the next issue.

The Museum Director and Curator are indeed fortunate in having the services of four graduate students from the University of Idaho to assist in several areas. The results of their work are already apparent, and a detailed account of their work will be in order at the end of the school year. For more on the plan see page 11.

The Historic Calendar Project, reviewed in previous issues, has been approved by the Board of Trustees for publication. It should go to the printers soon and be in our hands by August 1 at the latest, probably much earlier. As originally planned, it will be a 15-months calendar. We are indebted to Administrative Assistant Samuel Wegner for bringing the final layout together, making printing arrangements, and enabling us to move rapidly on the project at this time. The next challenge will be sales distribution and marketing of the product, all of which must be accomplished in a few months time, as we have a dated item which can soon

become outdated. Several good ideas have been advanced, and we are always looking for more. Individual readers may wish to buy a calendar or may know of local groups to which they belong that can use several. If you can dispose of one or more in this way, please write or contact the Museum now so your name can be put on a list.

A New Emphasis on Membership recruiting is under way. After much groundwork on our dues and membership structure last year, followed by a study of our income from these sources over the past several years by Administrative Assistant Tim O'Gorman, the final suggestions from both studies were brought together. The Board of Trustees approved the new membership structure pertaining to contributions and dues, which will go into effect immediately. This means the Membership Committee can proceed at once with plans to prepare brochures and other material and methods of contacting both old and new prospective members, business organizations, etc. New ideas are coming forth. Carol Renfrew has taken the chairmanship of this committee, and you will hear more from it in the near future.

The Oral History Project, which at last report was drawing to a close, has taken a new lease on life. Project Director Sam Schrager has, through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) and in cooperation with the County Commissioners, secured the services of an interview transcriber who will work toward completion of transcription of the existing tapes. This will enable Sam to do some additional field contacts and make additional strategic interviews. Also, under CETA it is probable that the position of project director will be funded for the remainder of the current fiscal year, at no cost to the Museum. The Society is providing nominal financial support in the area of office and expense money.

The Board has moved to cooperate with the Potlatch community in the planning of exhibits and the loan of some items to supplement the collection that may be donated from the Potlatch community. These exhibits are to be displayed in the Town Hall at Potlatch. An Historical Sites project covering much of Latah County is also



under way, and we expect to have a committee soon to further this idea. This is a theme which ties in with the Bicentennial and will extend on through 1976, during which period it should receive major emphasis. More on this later.

Incidental perhaps, but we are indebted to Professor William Snyder's class in architectural landscaping who took an evening recently to apprise the Board as to some plans and suggestions the class had developed for landscaping the Museum grounds. These grounds offer something of a challenge to these University of Idaho students, who require accessible and varied sites on which to work. Lou Cormier is our official landscape artist and works with many professional sources in arriving at his landscaping layouts.

It is not the intent here to relate all that is happening at the Museum. Projects noted and many others will to the extent possible be covered in greater detail in future issues. We are always in search of ideas and suggestions, but more so need the help of dedicated hands to convert those selected into reality.

--Leonard F. Ashbaugh

#### MEMORIAL GIFTS

The following memorials have been received by the Society since January 1, 1975:

In memory of Roy Naylor	\$ 107.50
In memory of Speed Lange	10.00
In memory of Mrs. Mark P. Miller	5.00
In memory of John Kambitsch	1,000.00
given by Mrs. W. T. Marineau and apportioned \$500.00 to the special building fund and \$500.00 to the general fund.	

We now have \$2,372.50 in bank certificates dedicated to the special building fund and \$347.81 in the dedicated savings account.

--Leora Stillinger, Treasurer

## THE EDITOR SPEAKS

Under the current public employment program available to our area through Title II of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) the Latah County Museum Society may have the opportunity to secure the services of a full-time director for the coming fiscal year. With seven county positions funded at the present time and three more pending, CETA has become an important means available to the county to provide employment and get needed work done. The job of museum director would be a professional position, with the Society having the option of setting up whatever qualifications it wished. Recent experience in filling CETA positions for the county has shown that there is a surprisingly large pool of highly qualified professional people to draw on at the present time.

The Museum Society has been extremely fortunate in being able to secure the services of Larry French as director during the early, critical years of the McConnell Mansion's operation. Larry has been employed full-time by the Society during the first three months of each year beginning in 1972. It would be hard to overestimate the value of his contributions to the development of the physical plant and to the programs of the Museum. His familiarity with Latah County and its people, his practical skills as a builder, his managerial talents, and his imaginative planning of exhibits and programs have made lasting contributions to the Society. As Museum Society members each of us owes a debt of gratitude to Larry for his dedication and for the generous sharing of his time at what surely has been considerable financial sacrifice. Larry has advised us many times that his commitment to the part-time directorship cannot continue indefinitely.

As valuable as it has been to have Larry as director, there has inevitably been a deterioration of continuity and a slackening of momentum of Society activities each year when April came and Larry had to return to the heavy demands of his work as a farmer and a tree farmer. This is not to minimize the accomplishments of the many dedicated volunteers who have carried on the work of the Society during the months when the office was closed. It is simply to note the practical reality of the



situation and how much Larry's presence has been missed during the months when he was of necessity not on duty. For example, the student interns now assigned to the Museum will be working there until the University's spring semester ends in May. Although the student projects are well under way and will doubtless be carried out very well, still it would seem somewhat disadvantageous both to the Museum and to the students that after April 1 they will be without Larry's continuing guidance and supervision.

The advantages of having a director employed the year around are compelling. He or she would have time for doing extensive public relations work which could result in broadening the base of financial support for the Society, including an increase in membership. Extension of liaison work with other agencies of the city and the county, the University and the public schools could result in increased effectiveness of the Society's programs. A full-time director would have the time to investigate the availability of assistance from foundations and government agencies for program development and to prepare proposals for securing such financial help. The latter is a most time-consuming job and one which so far the Society has lacked the manpower for.

A year-round director would be able to improve the coordination of the services of volunteer workers. There is a great reservoir of untapped talent among the members of the Society which, if someone had the time, could be drawn on to plan, organize, and carry out such projects as publications, special events like the proposed Victorian fashion show, and the forming of an auxiliary.

The intern program for University students could become a more effective source of assistance in program development. It is possible that it could be a program for both fall and winter semesters, which would benefit both the Museum and the students through greater flexibility in program planning and through the greater accomplishments which could be expected under supervision of the students by a full-time director.

If a major building project such as the development of

the basement of the McConnell Mansion were to be undertaken, a director's services in coordinating the project would be invaluable. The maintenance of exhibits in outlying towns and the loan of exhibits to schools are projects presently planned which could benefit from the supervision of a full-time director and could become important features of the Society's outreach program.

Perhaps most important with the Bicentennial year fast approaching would be the opportunity for the Society to play a strong role in the planning and carrying out of city and county Bicentennial projects and observances. What kind of Bicentennial programs are we going to have in Latah County? The answer will depend on the wishes and interests of those who are actively concerned about our heritage, and the possibilities are many. One thing is clear: the county's historical society has the obligation to play an effective leadership role in the execution of local Bicentennial activities.

A large part of the director's work in the coming year could be, in cooperation with local committees, to stimulate interest in the Bicentennial, to help organize and coordinate those projects which seem feasible and desirable. For example, the Moscow Bicentennial Committee has plans to discuss with local business men the potential restoration of some downtown building exteriors, both for historical reasons and to help maintain an attractive and distinctive shopping area downtown. This would be a most worthy project and one for which our director might provide needed follow through. Are there some old buildings in the county which could and should be saved, as part of the Bicentennial, for their historical value?

If the local area is to participate in national activities such as the Bicentennial wagon train, we must be able to seize the opportunities as they present themselves. A director could be closely involved with giving our annual town and county events (Troy Days, Kendrick Locust Blossom Festival, County Fair, etc.) a Bicentennial flavor in 1976. Projects such as those mentioned above would require not the spending of Museum funds but the kind of community cooperation that an



active full-time program can engender.

If we were to secure funding for a full-time director for the next fiscal year, what would be our options at the end of that period, in July 1976? We would hope that such a director could find funding to support continuation of year-round operation, or that possibly we could work out a director-sharing arrangement with a neighboring historical society. If these were not possible, the position could be reduced to part time. At least we would have accomplished a great deal during this most important Bicentennial year and during that time would have built up the organizational efficiency of the Society to the degree that the momentum could carry us into the future with a greatly improved program.

The program suggested here is within the realm of possibility. The application for allocation of CETA funds would have to be approved by the County Commissioners, who have shown themselves to be very receptive to such requests in the past. A CETA grant would pay a director's full salary, including fringe benefits, and would carry no direct cost to the Society. There would be additional expense involved, such as increased office supplies and part-time secretarial help, but these could be held to an amount covered by the director's salary which the Society is paying now. At the very least the Board should assign a high priority to a study of this possibility and give it serious consideration.

The time for action is now. The position would be for the Federal fiscal year of 1975-76, which begins July 1. The application should therefore be made early in June, so that a director could be appointed and on the job in July. We urge you as Museum Society members to communicate your opinions to members of the Board of Trustees. You will find them listed on page 9. All we are asking is that the possibility be carefully investigated and seriously considered. Let us not allow such an opportunity to go by default through our inaction.

--Lillian Otness

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN

This new schedule of membership dues adopted by the Board of Trustees became effective as of March 15, 1975.

	ANNUAL			BENEFACTOR
	Regular	Sustaining	Sponsoring	
Individual	\$ 5.00	\$25.00	\$100.00	\$500.00
Family	9.00	40.00	100.00	500.00
Firms	25.00	75.00	100.00	500.00

This change has been made primarily in the hope of increasing continuing support for the expanding program of the Museum Society. The change is NOT retro-active and does not affect the status of either regular individual memberships already paid for 1975, nor present five-year memberships paid up, nor life memberships, although the latter two categories are discontinued under the new schedule. For all of these and you, the Museum Board and staff are continually appreciative.

However, in view of the very modest fee for life memberships in the past and because those of you who contributed in this way have shown a more than passing interest in the Society, the membership committee at this time extends the suggestion and possibility to life members to contribute additional funds toward the museum program. This is NOT done with any feeling that life members have contributed too little-- without you there would have been no continuing program. And there is no obligation implied. Nevertheless, if any of you feel you can, gifts to the Museum in any amount would be most helpful.

The Board is set up to accept not only direct gifts but also to receive memorials and bequests.

--Carol Renfrew, Chairman



## CORRECTIONS

The January Bulletin erroneously reported that archives from the E. T. McConnell family and a dress which had belonged to Mrs. William E. Borah had been donated to the Museum by Frances McConnell. The donor was not the late Frances McConnell Baisch but Florence McConnell Stephens of Walnut Creek, California.

Also, we were in error in reporting that Nancy (Mrs. R. E.) Hosack was continuing as a Trustee-at-Large. We should have listed Harry Sampson in her stead. Because there have been several changes in the personnel of the Board of Trustees, we are printing the entire list here:

President:	Leonard Ashbaugh
1st Vice President:	Mrs. M. M. Renfrew
2nd Vice President:	Edward H. Nygaard
Secretary:	Mrs. W. L. Lundquist
Treasurer:	Mrs. C. R. Stillinger
Trustees-at-Large:	Mrs. Gerald Ingle Harry Sampson Jess C. Johnson
Past President:	Ray Berry

Trustees representing groups are:

Historical Club:	Mrs. Cora M. Knott Mrs. W. F. Schnell
Pioneer Association:	Mrs. Bessie Babcock Malcolm Neely
County Commissioners:	W. C. Jones
Staff members (non-voting):	Larry French Lou Cormier

## NEW FACILITIES

A feature of the Museum which few visitors will see but which will make an important contribution to the proper storage of donated articles has been developed during the early months of this year. This is the new textile storage room, located at the northwest corner of the upper floor of the Mansion. The facility has been designed by Susan Lehman, one of our student interns.

The room itself has been sealed to permit fumigation of the entire space or of individual containers; the window has been blocked to eliminate light, which can damage fabrics. On the north wall of the room are built-in wardrobes for storing garments on hangers, flanked on either side by shelves designed for storing articles in suitboxes of uniform size. Above wardrobes and shelves there is space for storing a large number of quilts or tablecloths or other flat articles rolled on rods supported at either end. Articles on the rods will be sealed in polyethylene covering to protect them from dust.

Shoes and hats will be stored in boxes of appropriate size, with umbrellas covered and stored on shelves. This wall affords over thirteen linear feet of storage space, floor to ceiling, and a high ceiling it is! On the opposite side of the room a large work table is hinged to the wall and can be folded up out of the way when not in use. Above the table level there is a large peg board for hanging garments temporarily.

Members and others who have been considering donating clothing or other textiles to the Museum can now feel confident that such articles can be taken care of properly and will be put to good use in preparing displays.

At the east end of the upstairs hall the space leading to the fire escape has been fitted up as a workshop for carpentry and accessioning. We now have a lighted workbench along one wall with storage shelves above extending to the ceiling. The opposite wall will also have cupboard and shelf space. The cupboards which have been installed were kindly donated to the Museum by the John Wallen family.

Another valuable contribution to exhibit facilities has been the gift by J. and J. Glass of Moscow of a 48" by 72" piece of plate glass. Mounted in a free-standing frame and placed in front of a mannequin displaying a garment, for example, it will serve to protect the exhibit from handling by the public and still allow visitors to see it at close range. The gift includes smaller pieces of glass which can be assembled into



a box-like display case for exhibiting such valuable items as documents or jewelry. Many thanks to J. and J. Glass.

### THE INTERN PROGRAM

The museology internship is a cooperative education program of the University of Idaho and the Latah County Museum Society. Its purpose is to provide working experience in a museum for graduate students preparing for professional careers in museology. Each intern spends time at the Mansion on a regular weekly schedule and works, under the supervision of the Director, on one or more projects concerned with program planning and development or with Society organization. Interns attend meetings of the Board of Trustees, by invitation of the Board, and are considered members of the staff of the McConnell Mansion, with the title of Administrative Assistant. With four interns this semester spending a total of thirty hours each week working at the Mansion, the program has become an impressive source of help for the professional staff of the Museum and for committees of volunteers.

According to Professor Ellis Burcaw, Director of the University Museum, who teaches the museology courses, University officials regard the McConnell Mansion as an excellent resource which provides first-hand working experience for students preparing for careers as museum professionals.

Student interns this semester and the projects on which they are working are:

Jennifer Jeffries, school loan exhibits  
Susan Lehman, textiles and textile storage  
Tim O'Gorman, membership recruitment  
Samuel Wegner, Potlatch exhibit and LCMS calendar

BOOK REVIEW

Whispers from Old Genesee and Echoes of the Salmon River, by John A. Platt. Reviewed by Sam Schrager, Director, Latah County Oral History Project.

With John Platt's book now being reprinted in a new edition, it is a good time to take stock of this exceptionally authentic account of early life in North Idaho. In my opinion Whispers from Old Genesee and Echoes of the Salmon River is pioneer history of the first rank, and we are fortunate that such a chronicle was recorded in this area.

Part of the book's significance lies in the earliness of its settings--Genesee in the 1880s and 1890s, largely before the town moved to its present location with the arrival of the railroad; and the Salmon River country during its homestead period around and after the turn of the century. Mr. Platt, who was born in 1877, writes of the Old Town Genesee days: "I was only a small boy at the time the earlier events transpired, but they made such a deep impression on my mind that I have never forgotten them."

It is clear that as a youngster he had a special curiosity about what was going on around him and a knack for listening when the grownups swapped stories. It is even more remarkable that these stories remained fresh in his memory for over half a century. When he took up a pen in his old age, he recalled events that the people of Genesee thought were important or interesting at the time they happened. As a result his book transports us back to the day-to-day life of that pioneer community, where we witness what was said and done--the joking and fighting, play and work, character traits and reactions. It matters not if, like myself, you didn't know most of the families, because you learn all you need to know as you read.

Although the events John Platt records are certainly unique to Genesee, they are also characteristic of pioneer life. What happened, for instance, when the veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic got togeth-



er? Or when townspeople bet heavily on whether a mule team could pull a sack of sand at the end of a mile-long rope? When angry settlers caught three murder suspects? When merchant Jacob Rosenstein forgot the combination to Genesee's safe? Or when a bridegroom threatened to have his shivaree party arrested?

Such particulars are placed in an accurate and interesting historical context. The Genesee valley of the book was one of the earliest parts of the Palouse to be settled and farmed. For a decade before the Northern Pacific reached Lewiston in 1898, Genesee served as the major railroad terminus for shipping over a large region that included the Camas Prairie. The allotment of the Nez Perce reservation and the presence of Indian neighbors also strongly influenced the area. This lively trading center had both a stable resident population and the frequent coming and going of new faces.

Two mentions of the Genesee militia are typical of the factual nuggets to be found in the book. While we are accustomed to thinking of the War of 1877 with the non-treaty Nez Percés as a frightening experience for local homesteaders, we learn that "the next year seemed to have been even more alarming for the settlers. They feared the Coeur d'Alene Indians might join the Bannocks and crush the settlements between them." Mr. Platt includes a list of the muster role. I was also surprised to discover that in 1892 a company was formed and sent to the Coeur d'Alene mining district to help quell the well-known fighting between the union and mining companies.

When in 1895 the scene shifts to John Platt's own homesteading on the Salmon River south of Winchester, it is as if time goes backward instead of forward, because life is more isolated and elemental than around Genesee. We learn what happens to a young family and their neighbors in extremely rugged open-range country. John Platt played an important part in the development of the area by introducing purebred Hereford bulls over a period of years, markedly improving the cattle on the range. Unfortunately, falling livestock prices, rising feed costs and the severe winter of 1919 combined to end the Platt brothers' operation.

John Platt is a masterful storyteller and a spare, skillful writer. The reader may get so completely absorbed in the many facets of a situation that he finds himself hanging on the outcome. The details that seem "to make a short story longer," as Mr. Platt puts it, are actually the yeast of everyday experience from which unusual happenings sometimes grow.

The hallmark of Whispers from Old Genesee and Echoes of the Salmon River is good humor. Here is a tale that John Platt tells about his father:

This occurred in the late fall, when the days were short and night came early. Dad was going to the saw mill for a load of lumber. The mill was about twenty miles away, and to make the trip and return was a big day's drive. A start before day-break was necessary.

We went to bed real early, and when dad awakened, he found to his dismay that the clock had stopped. Dad took a good look and knew he had overslept. All he had to do was look across the valley, and he could see the neighbors' lights gleaming. Everybody got up before daylight those short days. He aroused mother to get his breakfast, and prepare the lunch he would carry with him. He got Fred Harris up to harness and feed the team. After a hasty breakfast, the team was hitched to the running gears of the wagon and he was on his way. Fred Harris sat by the cook stove and fell asleep. He awakened with a start and returned to his bed. Mother lay down for a nap and slept until daylight.

Meanwhile dad followed the main dusty road toward the sawmill. Presently the lights in the farm houses became fewer and then vanished entirely. He had the entire road, in fact the entire world to himself. He drove into the mill yard just



as the mill hands were sitting down to their breakfast. He was, of course, the butt of a lot of joking. He arrived home with his load of lumber promptly at noon. He had only slept a short time, and the lights he had seen were the evening lights, and not the lights of early risers.

\* \* \* \* \*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** John Platt's book, out of print for more than twelve years, is now being reissued in a special memorial edition. First published in 1959, these reminiscences of pioneer times in some of Idaho's wildest country met such popular demand that it went through four more printings in the next few years. It has been unavailable for more than a decade.

The new edition, done by Ye Galleon Press, is in larger type than before, for easier reading. The original text is reproduced verbatim, but maps of the story areas have been added, as well as more detailed indexing and many new photo illustrations from the period of the story. Biographical sketches of the author and of Emma Batdorf Platt, the pioneer couple out of whose lives the book was written, also are new.

This reissue is in response to continuing inquiries and requests from individuals, libraries, and handlers from many parts of the U.S. Although first written as a family document, Whispers . . . and Echoes soon registered a popular appeal that far outran its author's expectations. The new edition, dedicated to his pioneer generation, is offered in keeping with the renewed historical interests of the national Bicentennial period.

Our Museum Society has been allocated 250 copies to be sold to members and friends. Proceeds from the sale of these copies will go into a fund for sponsoring publication of other local historical manuscripts.

This edition is in hardcover only, about 175 pages. As we go to press, we expect to have the books any day.

LATAH COUNTY  
MUSEUM SOCIETY  
110 South Adams  
Moscow, Idaho 83843

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#### NEW EXHIBIT

As we go to press, Lou Cormier, Museum Curator, is arranging in the southwest exhibit room of the Mansion what promises to be a most interesting display of textiles--materials and finished products in flatware (no constructed garments). Visitors to the exhibit will see five lovely quilts, including one unquilted one set up on a quilting frame. There will be a rug loom and examples of braided, crocheted, and hand-loomed rugs. Lou is planning to display a table of embroidered, knitted, and tatted lace, as well as a treasure chest--a round-topped trunk--overflowing with examples of different types of handwork. Miriam (Mrs. W. W.) Shelton is assisting with plans, and she and Lou hope to find a spinning wheel to add to the exhibit.

About 500 weavers will be coming to Moscow in June for the northwest regional conference of the Weaver's Guild. A Moscow-Pullman group, the Palouse Hills Weavers' Guild, is acting as hostess for the conference, which will attract weavers from all of the northwest states as well as British Columbia and the northern part of California. An invitation to visit the LCMS exhibit has been extended to conference participants.