

# LATAH LEGACY

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE LATAH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



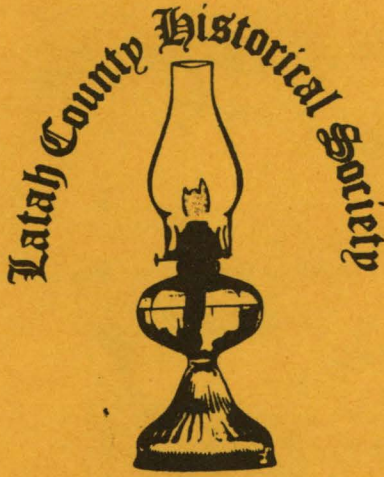
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PSYCHIANA  
PRINCETON HISTORY  
MOSCOW IN THE 1890s

Winter 1980

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Cover photo: Frank Bruce Robinson. LCHS Collection.



## PSYCHIANA

by

Keith Petersen

Author's Note: On January 14, 1980, the Special Collections Room of the University of Idaho Library was jammed with curious spectators and over 20 representatives from various press organizations. Five boxes of materials were lying on a table and, at 4:00 p.m., the boxes were opened. The boxes had been donated in 1955 by Alfred Robinson, with instructions that they not be opened for 25 years. The contents of the boxes provide the bulk of the material remains of Psychiana, at one time the largest mail-order religion in the world.

This is a condensed version of an article that first appeared in Idaho Yesterdays, the quarterly journal of the Idaho State Historical Society, in the fall of 1979 (vol. 23, no. 3). It is reprinted with permission. For those interested in further research, both the University of Idaho Library and the Latah County Historical Society have materials relating to Psychiana.

"You cannot find the Power of the presence of God through anything any church teaches, for the simple reason that what they teach is not of God." A statement such as this would probably cause ripples in the social fabric of a community even today. If espoused in a small Idaho town in the 1920's, during the time of confrontations between fundamentalists and scientists, it could be expected to cause considerable dissention. And it did. Yet Frank Bruce Robinson, operating out of Moscow, Idaho, was able to parlay an anti-Christian doctrine with a belief in the power of positive thinking and a shrewd business sense into the world's largest mail-order religion.

As is the case with many religious leaders, Frank Robinson's early life is shrouded in mystery. He was born in England in the 1880's. His father, John Henry Robinson, was a strict disciplinarian and a hellfire-and-brimstone Congregationalist minister. According to the younger Robinson, the father treated his children with much cruelty. When his wife died, John Robinson remarried. After a physical confrontation with the stepmoth-

er he despised, Frank Robinson was forced from the family home. As a young boy he journeyed to Canada, eventually making his way to the United States. He joined the Royal Northwest Mounted Police and then the United States Navy, being discharged from both for alcoholism. He enlisted in the United States Army and was court-martialed for willful disobedience of orders. At this point his life began to change. He found employment as a drugstore clerk in Klamath Falls, Oregon, and in 1919 married Pearl Leavitt. Shortly thereafter they moved to Tucson, where Robinson became a licensed pharmacist. Eventually they moved to Yakima, Washington, and then to Moscow, where Robinson continued his employment as a druggist.

It was the search for religious truth, not pharmacy, that was Robinson's lifeblood. He once stated that he was glad he had been mistreated as a child, for "these cruelties drove me closer . . . to the heart of God." From an early date he knew he had been "set aside" for the purpose of making known to the earth the truths about God. In an effort to try to learn God's



truths, Robinson's early life was sprinkled with religious experiences of a varied sort, from a stint in the Salvation Army to attendance at a Bible training school. But it was not until after he discarded Christian teachings and "began to let my reason rule" that he found his first glimmer of hope.

By the late 1920's Robinson's beliefs were gaining form, and he looked for a place of employment that would allow him time to organize his thoughts. He moved to Moscow and took a job in a drugstore. In the evenings he wrote. Within a few months he had convinced a group of local residents to back him financially in a plan to organize a "psychological religion." Shortly thereafter he held his first public meeting, a lecture on the God Power, in the Moscow Hotel. In 1929 he placed his first national advertisement in a psychology magazine and used the phrase that was to become the keystone of his movement: "I talked with God--yes I did--actually and literally."

From these beginnings, Robinson's religion prospered for over twenty years. That first advertisement brought an unexpected flood of responses from nearly 3,000 people. One of those who replied was Geoffrey Birley, a wealthy British cotton exporter who later wrote Robinson: "No words of mine can adequately express the glorious thrill [your teachings have given me]." Though he could not find words with which to thank Robinson, he did provide the prophet with financial backing and a name for his movement. In that first letter, Birley enclosed a photograph of himself. After receiving the picture, Robinson had a dream in which he saw Birley making mystic motions over a corpse and saying, "This is Psychiana, the power that will bring new life to a spiritually dead world." Robinson's fledgling movement thus was named. Robinson immediately wrote Birley, stating Birley was "to be associated with me in this business." Birley responded by wiring \$40,000. Although Birley did not remain closely associated with Psychiana,

his original donation made the movement financially solvent.

Psychiana grew from an organization with one part-time stenographer to become Latah County's largest private employer. Its facilities enlarged from a rented second-floor room to two large buildings in the central part of town. Although it is impossible to ascertain the exact number of Psychiana students, it is safe



Frank Robinson while a Corner drug employee. Clifford Ott collection.

to say the Psychiana teachings reached hundreds of thousands of followers in over sixty countries. Robinson wrote more than twenty books outlining his beliefs. His tax-exempt organization was a trend-setter in the religious use of the mass media and became the largest mail-order religion in the world.

From the first advertisement in 1929 the basic operation of the Psychiana method was set. Robinson advertised his beliefs in national magazines and newspapers--eventually with ads appearing in over eighty magazines and 700 newspapers simultaneously--and always used the same message: he had spoken with God, it had made him a prosperous and happy man, he could do the same for others if they would write to him. Those who did write were



encouraged to enroll in a religious correspondence course. For a fee the Psychiana student received a set of twenty lessons, one every two weeks. These lessons were to be read and studied, with study questions provided at the end of each. If students were not satisfied with the lessons, the return of their money was guaranteed.

Lessons were assembled by Psychiana employees working in Moscow, which in the 1930's and 1940's offered few vocational opportunities for woman laborers. Employment at Psychiana, assembling lessons or sorting mail, was most desirable, and all the Psychiana employees--with the exception of executives and some printers--were women. The operation was separated into various components--advertising, accounting, lesson assembly, printing--each department having its own staff. An average of forty to fifty people were steadily employed by Psychiana, although the number could reach as high as 100 during peak mailing periods. At times as many as 50,000 pieces of mail were sent from the advertising department in a single day.

In the lesson-assembly area, lessons were put together on an innovative mechanically rotating table designed specifically for this use. Mailing lists were constantly revitalized, and the lists came from many sources. Psychiana annually bought from other businesses lists of people who had made purchases through the mail. Robinson also encouraged his students to supply him with "friends lists" of people who might be interested in receiving the Psychiana lessons. This amazingly complex system not only marked Psychiana as a religious trend-setter in the use of mass mailing and mass advertising, but also was looked upon with envy by business organizations around the country. It ran nearly free of error, and almost as many business people made pilgrimages to Moscow to see this organizational wizardry as did religious converts to see their prophet.

While the melding of business and religion to such a degree was unusual, the message disseminated by Psychiana was not. Robinson claimed he was a direct prophet of God who wrote by divine inspiration, and



Lesson assembly table in the Psychiana office at the northeast corner of First and Main streets. Photo by Charles Diamond; Clifford Ott collection.



he repeatedly denied that he was influenced by other religious and secular movements of his day. Nonetheless, the development of Psychiana cannot be viewed apart from the times during which it existed.

The 1920's saw several remarkable changes in American theology. A life insurance company pamphlet entitled Moses, Persuader of Men described Moses as "one of the greatest salesmen and real-estate promoters that ever lived." Businessmen were at the apex of their public esteem, and, as Edward Parington wrote in 1921, "The sanest religion is business." Bruce Barton's The Man Nobody Knows, which pictured Jesus as the epitome of a business organizer, was the nonfiction best seller for the years 1925 and 1926. One response to this situation was an effort at hucksterism on the part of many churches. The Methodist Zion's Herald wrote: "The old idea that a minister is above stooping to commercial devices must disappear if the church is to grow."

The 1920's also saw the first great flowering of the forces of positive thinking. While it was not a new genre, the immense popularity of writers like Emile Coue, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Lloyd C. Douglas, and Roger Babson reached new heights and inspired millions of Americans.

Amid this activity, traditional churches suffered a serious depression during the decade. Though it might have been expected that the hard times of the thirties would have refocused attention on religion, the religious depression became even more extreme. Even churchgoing people looked to Washington instead of God in the extremity. But the 1930s did see a continuation of the cult of success that had proven so popular in the previous decade. The myth of the American Dream was perpetuated even at the peak of economic stagnation. Business publicists, movie makers, writers of popular fiction and how-to-succeed guidebooks continually attempted to shore up any leakage in belief in America as the land

of opportunity. The Parker Brothers' board game "Monopoly" enabled players to imaginatively get rich even though economic conditions all but prohibited such activity in reality. Bank nights, Bingo games, the Irish Sweepstakes--all these served to keep alive a sense of hope, as did the enormously popular best seller of 1936, the ultimate in positive thinking, Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People.

Robinson was a keen observer of society, and his teachings show that he was not unaware of these trends in religious and secular life. His was obviously a religion with a business orientation, and Psychiana actively perpetuated other popular theories of the time as well. In the battle raging between fundamentalists and scientists, the height of which was reached at the Scopes Trial in 1924, Robinson clearly favored the latter, stating: "All religious history of the world cannot refute one scientific fact of truth." He was also a strong adherent of the belief in the power of positive thinking. "You cannot continually think 'failure' without being a failure. Nor can you continually think success without being a success." Finally, Robinson preached the possibility of material success and happiness despite the Depression. "If the desire is right YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW. . . . You may find the Power of God and actually use it to bring to you and yours, WHILE YOU ARE ALIVE, a superabundance of happiness, peace, comfort, financial security, domestic happiness--in fact everything for your own good."

To understand all of the influences on Robinson's ideology, and the position of Psychiana in the broader spectrum of American religion, it is necessary to go back earlier than the 1920's. Phineas P. Quimby was born in 1802 and claimed to have been cured of tuberculosis. By 1859 he was living in Portland, Maine, treating patients with a myriad of ailments by using spiritual healing techniques he claimed to have rediscovered from Jesus' time. In addition, he taught that every



person was possessed of a degree of divinity. Quimby would today be unrecognized in the annals of American religious history, however, if he had not healed one Mary Patterson--later Mary Baker Eddy--in 1862. When Quimby died in 1866, Eddy determined to carry on his teachings. Later she would deny that Quimby had influenced her and assert that the revelations she brought to her movement of Christian Science (a term Quimby had used before her) were original contributions. After she had gained fame in her own right as the founder of Christian Science, she claimed that her earlier devotion to Quimby had been the result of a mesmeric spell he had cast on her. Regardless of its origins, Eddy's particular abilities brought Christian Science into prominence. She rejected many traditional Christian dogmas, such as original sin, the trinity, and the idea of heaven and hell. Christian Scientists believed that Jesus was a man who had demonstrated Godliness to a much greater extent than others but did not believe he was the Son of God. Nor did they believe there were such things as sin and evil; and they believed the cause of all disease was mental.

By the 1880's, many would-be Christian Scientists began to take exception to Eddy's authoritarian methods, and splinter groups were formed. By the 1890's the term "New Thought" was beginning to be used to describe these groups, and in 1915 the International New Thought Alliance was organized "to teach the infinitude of the Supreme One, the Divinity of Man and his Infinite possibilities through the creative power of constructive thinking and obedience to the voice of the Indwelling Presence."

While Robinson denied outside influences, the similarities between his teachings and those of other New Thought movements are more than coincidence. His basic teachings were traditional New Thought ideas, and Psychiana offered nothing new to the doctrinal facet of American religion. Like Eddy, Robinson did not believe in such traditional Christian

dogmas as the miraculous birth of Jesus, the resurrection, the atonement, the trinity, and original sin. God was not a personality, but rather a force and power. "There is no personality of any kind connected with this creative Life



Frank Robinson in his downtown Moscow study, early 1940s. LCHS collection.

Principle or Spirit--It is Law." A natural extension of this belief was that Jesus could not have been a God, because the God Power was a force, not a personality. Robinson continuously cited the powers of Jesus in his lessons, but Jesus to him was merely possessed of the God Power, to no greater degree than was Robinson himself, nor to any greater degree than it was possible for anyone to be who diligently followed the Psychiana teachings. Robinson also did not believe in the Bible as inspired, finding it unscientific and not trustworthy. To him, there was no such thing as sin.

Also branding him, along with other New Thought believers, as non-Christian was his lack of belief in a heaven and hell. His was not "pie in the sky" religion. All of a person's desires could be met on earth. If people did good or bad works, they would be rewarded or punished on



earth, not in an afterlife. While one of Robinson's chief quarrels with Christianity was Christianity's promise of a better life in the hereafter when in fact the good life could be attained now, he did nonetheless believe in eternal life. His beliefs in this area were rather ill-defined, but it was impossible for the soul to die. The great promise for humanity, as Robinson saw it, was in learn-



Robinson addressing a convention. LCHS collection.

ing all of the truths about the God Power, for then there would not be physical death, and eternal life on earth would be a glorious possibility, for "if you had all the wealth you need, if you had all the happiness . . . this old world would be a beautiful place for you to live in, AND YOU WOULD NEVER WANT TO LEAVE IT."

All of this--happiness on earth, healthy living, material wealth--was available to any individual who assiduously followed the Psychiana lessons. Hard work and study were required, but it was possible to find the God Power if all the steps were followed. If one did fail, he would at least receive his money back.

While he was not a major innovative force in American theology, Frank Robinson had a profound impact upon the Moscow area. At the entrance to town in the 1930's stood a large sign that proclaimed:

MOSCOW, IDAHO  
KNOWN THE WORLD OVER AS THE  
HOME OF PSYCHIANA  
THE NEW PSYCHOLOGICAL RELIGION

The sign was a symbol--not a pleasant one for some--of the impact Robinson had on his community.

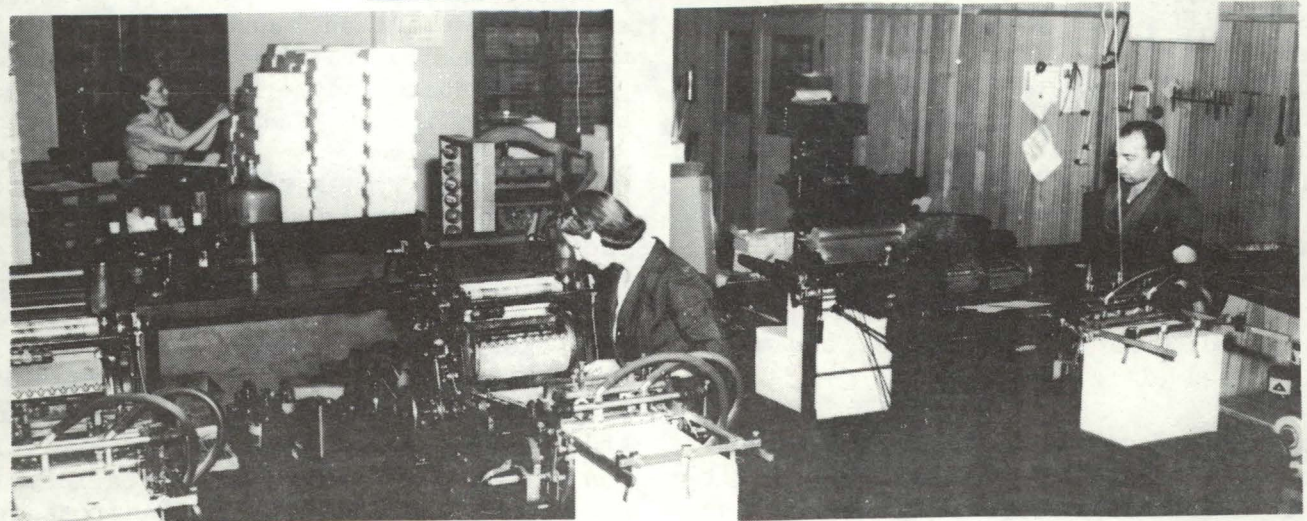
Most of the changes Robinson brought to his town were positive. Psychiana provided employment to dozens of people who would otherwise have been unemployed during the Depression. He constructed two large buildings in Moscow. Because of the tremendous volume of mail going to and coming from the Psychiana offices daily, Moscow's post office attained first-class status despite the fact that the town had a population of only 5,000. Robinson provided Moscow with its first youth center and owned three drugstores. He was among the most generous contributors to charities in the area, and his kindnesses--from donating cash registers to fledgling businessmen, to giving gifts and money to poor people, to donating a park to Latah County--are still legend in the area.



By far Robinson's greatest impact on the community, however, and the one with the most long-standing overtones, was his publication of a daily newspaper. There is some uncertainty about why Robinson wanted to start a daily paper--Moscow already had one daily, and it is unusual for a town of 5,000 to have two--but apparently there were two reasons for the move. Robinson believed he could self-publish his many books and materials more economically than he could hire it done, and he also had a strong dislike for George Lamphere, publisher of the Moscow Star-Mirror. The differences between the two included a political feud between a staunch Republican (Robinson) and an equally strong-willed Democrat and a difference of opinion over the financial arrangements of Psychiana publishing, which the Star-Mirror handled exclusively in the early days. The split became bitter, and consequently Robinson bought the Elk River News in 1934, moved the operation to Moscow, and renamed the paper the News-Review. The News-Review from then on did all Psychiana publishing. For several years both newspapers operated at a loss, with neither side willing to merge. Finally, at the death of Lamphere, the two papers merged to form the Daily Idahonian--still Moscow's newspaper--with the Robinson family owning the controlling interest.

Robinson was meticulous in his efforts to keep his newspaper separated from his religion, and neither the News-Review nor the Idahonian served as a mouthpiece for the Psychiana philosophy. In fact, realizing that he was already controversial enough, Robinson refused to advertise locally or allow local residents to subscribe to the Psychiana lessons.

There were many in Moscow who questioned Robinson's sincerity. Theodora Smith, in her weekly Moscow paper, wrote the following in an otherwise favorable obituary: "As P. T. Barnum . . . asserted people loved being fooled, paid generously for that privilege, Dr. Robinson . . . often stated to fellow townsmen that it mattered not if he believed his assertions--as long as he profited financially thereby." Robinson drove expensive cars, dressed immaculately, and owned a comfortable home--complete with the only residential pipe organ in Idaho. Stories circulated by postal workers claimed that financial contributions "came in by the mail bag full." It is obvious that Robinson did well financially--although he was not as wealthy as legend would have it. But he viewed this as only an example of what the God Power could bring to an individual and in fact widely advertised his personal success as an example of what could happen to anyone who followed his teachings.



Psychiana printing operation. Photo by Charles Diamond; Clifford Ott collection.



The overwhelming local reaction, however, seemed to be simply to ignore Psychiana. While mildly interested, most residents apparently were not upset at having such a movement based in their town.

Robinson, though, had a paranoid belief, out of proportion with reality, that he was continually harassed. "Crackpots have often threatened my life," he once told a reporter, and he always carried a handgun. He also tape recorded all conversations held in his office. In 1945 he submitted a petition to the United States House of Representatives alleging persecution of Psychiana by eighty-four Better Business Bureaus that he claimed attempted to influence publications not to carry Psychiana advertising.

If there ever was an organized movement to rid Moscow of Psychiana, it seems to have flowered briefly in 1936 and 1937. At that time J. E. Nessly founded a newspaper in the nearby town of Deary, with the primary purpose of discrediting Robinson.

In 1936 Robinson was indicted on charges of falsifying his place of birth on his passport. Robinson had always claimed, and apparently believed, that he was an American citizen by virtue of the fact that he had been born in New York while his parents were on vacation there. He was mistaken, as he had actually been born in England, but was acquitted of the passport falsification charges nonetheless. No sooner was the trial over, however, than the Immigration Department began deportation proceedings, charging Robinson with illegal entry into the United States. Robinson was actually ordered deported, but at the intervention of Senator William E. Borah the order was modified. Robinson was allowed to travel briefly to Cuba, obtain a proper visa, and return to the United States. In 1942 he became a naturalized citizen.

Despite his legal problems, Robinson kept Psychiana operating smoothly. When it appeared that the teachings might lose some of their appeal as the country gradually lifted itself out of the Depression,

Robinson, ever the opportunist, organized a "spiritual Blitzkrieg" against Adolph Hitler. It was not guns that would bring the destruction of the Nazis, but millions intoning three times a day, "The unseen forces of God are bringing about the speedy defeat of the Axis."

It is impossible to say whether the anti-Hitler campaign would have been Psychiana's last hurrah, or if Robinson would have been able to rechannel efforts to other areas in his attempt to reach larger numbers of followers. A series of heart attacks beginning in the mid-forties cut down on the activities of this extremely energetic man. On October 19, 1948, he died. For four years Pearl Robinson and Alfred, the Robinsons' son, attempted to continue the movement. It is doubtful if their hearts were really in the effort, and in January of 1953, the mailings ceased, officially because of "increasing costs of materials and the additional operating expenses brought on by . . . inflation" and increased postal costs. For all practical purposes, the movement, as is the case with so many religious sects, actually died with the death of its charismatic leader.

Even had Robinson lived, it is doubtful if Psychiana would ever have regained its pre-war popularity. After the war, the shock treatment of Robinson's approach had lost its uniqueness. It was no longer revolutionary to say that people wanted something more than church theology. It was not unusual for respectable theologians to debate the merits of a book such as Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking. It was not unusual for churches to advertise--via church bulletins and billboards, newspapers and radio--the merits of their brand of religion. These changes in twentieth century religion would have taken place had Frank Robinson never accomplished more in life than being a drug clerk in Moscow's Corner Drug Store. But as an interesting and colorful example of changing religious, social, and intellectual beliefs in the 1930's and 1940's, Psychiana has few equals.



## PALOUSE VALLEY HISTORY

by

Alec L. Bull

Editor's Note: The following is a condensed version of a manuscript entitled Palouse Valley History. The article was published by the Princeton Grange in 1945 and limited to 100 copies. It has long been out of print and is reprinted here with the permission of the author.

The first white man came into the Palouse Valley from the north. What were his feelings as he gazed for the first time upon this region? It would be utterly foolhardy to presume that he grabbed his coonskin cap by the tail, threw it high into the air, and shouted, "Yippee! This is it!"

This first intruder into this virgin wilderness, whatever his name, was a trapper sent out by the Northwest Company, which had its headquarters near the present location of Spokane, Washington, one hundred and forty years ago. What the trapper was interested in was how many beaver, lynx, coyote, and muskrat pelts this region, drained by the Palouse, would yield in the season beginning in November and ending when the snow went out the following spring.

When the trapper looked upon the upper Palouse he saw a small stream which wound its way westward through many natural meadows, bordered on both sides by vast reaches of timbered hills. Pine, fir and tamarack grew then as it grows now, but there was no dense second growth and underbrush. Fires set by lightning kept the ground litter all burned off.

The trappers took out a great harvest of

pelts during the years from 1805 to 1830. Such intensive trapping had its effect. Fur-bearing animals became scarce. The white men withdrew. Only the redskins of the Coeur d'Alenes, the Nez Perces, and the Palouse tribes roamed over the valley, fishing, digging camas root, and picking huckleberries. For thirty years no white man left his track along this stream.

And then, in 1860, occurred an event that introduced a rapid change. Gold was discovered at Orofino.

Miners flocked into the Clearwater country. Parties of prospectors scoured the country in all directions. Hundreds prospected the Palouse River and in 1862 gold was discovered in the Hoodoos.

The nearest trading post was Lewiston. Prices there were high: eggs, \$1 a dozen; butter, \$1 a pound; and flour, \$16 a sack. Prices of these commodities when packed into this district were doubled. In the Hoodoos at this time four main gulches were developed. Miners worked only those mines that paid from \$20 a day, and up, for they could not make expenses on lower producing claims. Some mines made their owners \$100 a day, but even that was not considered high production in view of the costs and work.



Mining involved cold, wet, laborious endeavor. Ditches had to be dug, and dams made. All lumber for sluice boxes, and rockers, and other equipment had to be sawed by hand. To make lumber this way, logs were rolled upon an elevated platform. One man stood beneath, the other stood on top the log, and they traversed the length of the log as their saw ate its way from one end to the other. By the hardest work they could make only a few boards a day.

The first Hoodoo boom lasted two years. When in 1864, reports of a gold discovery in Montana reached the Hoodoos, most of the miners pulled out for the richer fields.

Six years passed. In 1870, on Camas, Jerome, and Gold Creeks there were discoveries of gold. Claims on these locations paid as well as those in the Hoodoos had done. No great excitement accompanied these discoveries, mainly because at the same time rich strikes were made in the Coeur d'Alenes, to which many miners were attracted. An overflow of miners from the Coeur d'Alenes brought a flood back into this area. The secondary gulches in the Hoodoos were worked.

A man by the name of John Grizzel, had a camp on the Palouse River. This camp bore

his name for years, was often erroneously called "Grizzly Camp," and has now been named Laird Park. [Camp Grizzly is the name of a Boy Scout camp near Laird Park.]

By this time the town of Farmington had been established. Supplies were nearer and not so expensive. The lower paying mines were profitable.

When the first miners worked the Clearwater country, they went ahead under the threat of trouble from the Indians. The Nez Perces opposed the intrusion upon their territory, and turned back some parties of prospectors.

On the Palouse River little trouble was had with Indians. The valley was a dividing line between the Coeur d'Alenes on the north and the Nez Perces on the south. The Palouse tribe preferred the open country to the west. So, although redskins came into the valley regularly to dig camas roots, fish, and pick huckleberries in season, there were few Indians here the year around.

Occasionally, a group of "buck" Indians would visit a settler's home. They always expected to eat when they did, and they took great pleasure in using the white man's knives and forks at the table. They were very awkward with these uten-



Fourth-of-July celebration in early Princeton. LCHS collection.



sils and would laugh at each other at the clumsy way they used in getting food from their plates to their mouths.

The white man's grindstone was a highly prized possession to the Indians. After they had been fed, the entire group would gather around the grindstone and sharpen their knives.

There would never be a child in evidence while the Indians were present at a settler's cabin. When the red men had ridden away, however, youngsters would crawl out from under beds and other places of hiding where they had lain watching with fearful eyes the antics of the visitors.

Neither the miners, nor the homesteaders that followed them had any trouble with Indians. The development of mining in this district went ahead without any hindrance, other than that imposed by deep snow in winter or lack of water in the summer.

Chinamen came in and scores of them worked every stream and tributary along with the white men. They were not allowed to file claims in their own right, but secured release from the miners who held claims. In charge of all the Orientals on each location was a boss Chinaman. He was able to understand and speak English. He bargained for the rights to work the ground, bought all the supplies of food for his men, and kept order among his crew. His job carried a heavy diplomatic responsibility also, for the whites despised the yellow men and frequent fancied grievances had to be ironed out.

The white men resented the fact that the patient Chinese, working over ground that had already been mined by the careless whites, or ground that had been abandoned, would get out gold. More than one Chinaman was shot under mysterious circumstances, the body robbed of its gold before being tossed into a ditch and covered with gravel. In 1880, there occurred the Camas Creek Massacre, when an entire Chinese settlement was wiped out. After that, the Oriental population began

to thin out, for the Chinamen no longer trusted the whites. From the mines on the other creeks, and in the Hoodoos, the Chinese quietly withdrew and left the country.

While placer mining predominated, there was also some quartz mining. The two methods differ in that the placer miner separates gold from creek gravel and the quartz operator finds the gold in combination with other minerals in quartz. He has to separate the gold from these other minerals by a milling process. This requires power and machinery.

Dudley C. Tribble, who came to the Palouse River Valley from Kansas in 1875, was one acquainted with all phases of mining. He prospected widely in this



Dudley Tribble. Clifford Ott collection.

territory and named many of the streams on which he worked including Flannigan Creek, Rock Creek, Hatter Creek, Flat Creek, Sand Creek, and Turnbow Gulch. He was thoroughly experienced with the



gold pan, the pick, and the shovel as he sought gold all over the Palouse River drainage. He became expert at quartz mining as well.

On Camas Creek he built an arrastra wheel 32 feet in diameter. To provide water to power this wheel a ditch two miles in length was dug, bringing water across the ridge from the head of Garden Gulch.

The force of the water turned the wheel and the power thus generated dragged some huge slabs of rock around and around, grinding up the ore beneath them.

Jake Johnson, Sr., every Saturday supplied the miners in the Hoodoos from his farm at Woodfell, above what is now Harvard. The miners were glad to be able to buy fresh eggs, butter, cheese, and other commodities, and paid good prices. Jake Johnson, also, had the post office there, the mail being brought in by stage.

As the trapping era had gone, so went the mining era. The trappers took all the fur animals and had nothing more to stay for. When the miners had worked over all the ground, and had taken out all the gold, they too left. But the evidence of the miner's work remains.

This entire region, drained by the Palouse, is today pitted with prospect holes; overgrown with brush; tunneled with collapsed horizontal shafts; seamed with ditches which in some cases extended for miles to bring water from one creek to mining operations on another, hummocked with heaps of residual gravel, which has been sifted diligently by the restless miner--all a silent testimony to the prodigious amount of labor expended in the early days in the quest of the elusive yellow metal.

Palouse City, shortened to simply Palouse about 1900, was the nearest town until Judge John Starner came here in 1890. Starner had been probate judge in Columbia County, Washington, for two terms. On the property now used by the Forest Service at

Hampton (west of present-day Princeton), Judge Starner erected a building which housed a general store and a post office. This nucleus of a settlement was called Starner.

There was a dance hall overhead and on dance nights Judge Starner kept his store open all night, selling crackers and cheese and tobacco. There were always loungers around his stove.

With a store, post office and dance hall at Starner's settlement, the beginning of a town was made. By now the land of the Palouse Valley was being rapidly settled, for the soil was found to be rich.

Homesteads were located in the surrounding area, with McMahens and Pankeys north toward Gold Hill, Chambers and Cochranes on the flat to the east, Trotters and Pledgers to the northwest, Wornstaff and many other families in the Hatter Creek country. In the beginning of the homestead period the Hatter Creek area (named for an early settler) was no more remote than any other section. There were no towns of Princeton, Harvard, or Potlatch, and from Moscow or Palouse City it did not matter which side of the valley a home was located. Hatter Creek basin was a bit closer to Moscow because of a road which crossed the mountain from Moscow at the head of Rock Creek. This road can still be used over most of the original route.

Hamlin McCoy lived northeast on what was later called the Ruhl place; Cyrus L. Kinman, the father of Claud, Gus, and Fred, came here, a Civil War veteran, to settle in 1890 "eight miles east of Starner village"; Homer Canfield in 1890; Charles F. Smith in 1886; and James R. Vassar, another Civil War veteran took up a homestead on what is now known as Vassar Meadows, near Avon. H. L. Hawkins arrived in 1888. He carried mail from Palouse City, and was later to be a member of the school board for twelve consecutive years.



Judge John Starner's settlement appeared destined to permanency. When the Judge built a blacksmith shop, and equipped it for Dan Lackner to run, he added another institution to his growing business center.



Starner store. LCHS collection.

However, there was a little opposition. What the Indians had long used as a camp ground, the flat east of Starner, was favored by some as a better place for the town. This land, now the Henry Vowels place, was then owned by Orville Clough. Clough came from Minnesota, where his brother was governor of that state. Orville, who was strongly in favor of a town on the flat, subdivided some of his meadow into lots, giving some of them away to induce people to start settling here.

But it was an uphill proposition, for Starner had everything that appeared to be necessary for a town--almost everything. And the one thing that the settlement of Starner lacked was what swung the balance in favor of establishing the town on the flat. Starner did not have a schoolhouse.

Orville Clough donated the ground for a school. Logging crews of Dudley Tribble, Ace Robbins, and Ed Snowman set to work getting out logs for the building. In a short time the school house was finished.

The location of the school was the master stroke that definitely established the community center. The failure to consider education as important by those who favored Starner's settlement caused them to lose the race. In the new location a new store was opened, a saloon was soon built, and a sawmill started.

The town needed a name. In Minnesota, Orville Clough's home town was Princeton. It is only natural, therefore, that he call the new town Princeton also.

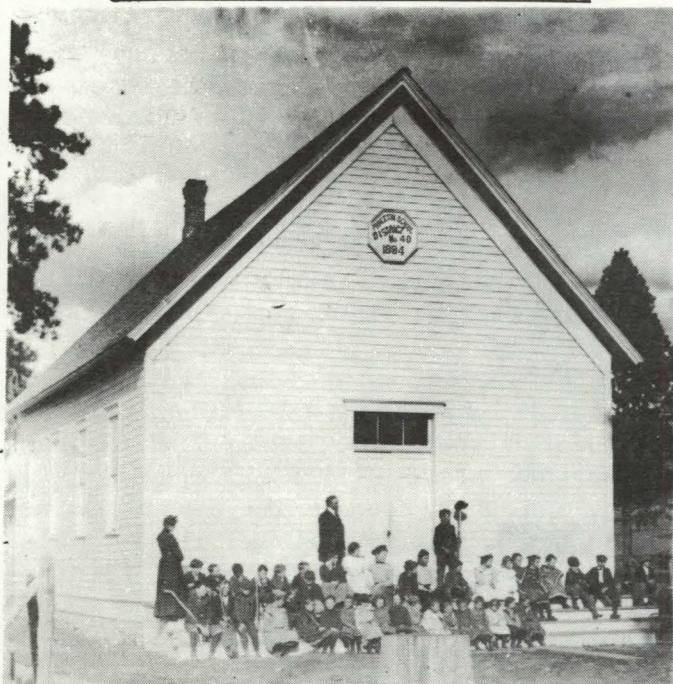
Princeton's first store and post office was operated by Joe Jenks. This building was located where the state liquor dispensary now stands. Mining was in full swing, and when Joe put in his store he did much business with the miners. In fact, Joe was their particular friend. When bad luck dogged a miner and he found no gold, Joe would always stake him for a new try.

Ed Parker, who mined in the Hoodoos and did business with Joe Jenks, finally became interested in Joe's store. With the financial backing of a man called "One-Armed" Clark, he bought a partnership in the establishment. It is interesting to note that "One-Armed" Clark, in spite of his handicap, was a painter and paper-hanger by trade, and that he never thought it funny to be told that "he was as busy as a one-armed paper-hanger."

Ed Parker did well as postmaster and merchant. In 1894 he was the possessor of the first bicycle in this country. On it he pedaled to Chambers Flat about once a week to pay court to a school teacher who taught in a log school house that had now been erected near Camas Creek outlet. Ed was able finally to buy sole control of the store. He married the schoolteacher. Joe Jenks returned now and then from a job as purser on a ship plying the Alaska run.



Orville Clough and others formed a company and built a sawmill below the present river bridge. This was larger than the usual backwoods mill and cut a good grade of lumber. Lumber from this mill went into the construction of the houses of Henry Lienhard, Floyd Layton, and Henry Vowels. D. C. Tribble helped log for this mill, using oxen.



Princeton School circa 1900. University of Idaho collection.

In those days logs were hauled to the river bank during the winter. When the snow went out and the water in the river rose high in the spring, the logs were floated to the sawmill in the legendary log drives. There was a sawmill at Palouse City, one at Elberton, and Codd's mill at Colfax. All of these used the river each spring for drives which started as far up as Meadow Creek. It took at least a month to get a log drive through to Colfax.

In 1902, the Princeton sawmill had a pond full of logs on the first of July. On the 4th a big celebration was scheduled. Unprecedented rains came, the river rose, and over-ran its banks. By the fourth of July logs from the mill pond, were floating about in the knee-deep

water running down Princeton's main street. The celebration was postponed until July 10th.

The homesteaders never had an easy time of it. Clearing away the brush, before they could put their land into cultivation, was extremely hard work. There being no railroad up the Palouse Valley isolated them from markets. In the year 1893 a depression brought great hardship. The price of wheat was 23 cents. A load of wood, hauled by team to Palouse City, brought \$2 a cord if a purchaser could be found. Timothy hay, hauled all the way from Meadow Creek to Palouse City, brought a price of \$5 a ton.

People began to move out. The Hatter Creek community became a ghost settlement. It had been rather widely settled because of the road from Moscow. Now the road was used again by the settlers moving away. The High Pothek, a financial syndicate, took over many a farm homestead during this trying period.

Clearings on Hatter Creek can still be made out, the remains of the old fences enclosing them, the ground smoothed by cultivation, the dead furrows traced--but grown over now with an even stand of pine trees.

Hard times still existed after ten years. About 1903 hope was raised in the community by a rumor that a big concern was buying up timber land throughout the Palouse Valley. A huge mill, the biggest in the world, was to be built, but the location of it was a matter of much conjecture. Some dared to guess that it might be at Princeton.

The name of the big concern was the Potlatch Lumber Company. It purchased the mills at Palouse, Elberton, and Colfax, operating them only long enough to saw up the stock of logs. In this way the Company obtained sole rights to the river and could put in their dam where they pleased. Finally, the location of the Company's big mill was settled when clearing of the



millsite began three miles west of Princeton. Railroad grading began in 1904, and in the week of July 28, 1905, seven carloads of steel rails were unloaded at the Potlatch Lumber Company's mill yard at Palouse. On Friday, August 4, 1905, the first spike was driven in the laying of steel for the W. I. & M. Railroad.

As the work progressed, the effect was felt in Princeton. Hotel and merchandising business increased. There were now two general stores and a butcher shop. Four saloons were doing a flourishing business. H. L. Hawkins was running the Hotel Princeton, which he built. Fred Lienhard and Arthur Craig built the red livery barn and had teams for hire. Dan Lackner had moved his blacksmith shop down from Starner, which with the coming of the railroad, became known as Hampton. Judge Starner moved away and started another business up Deep Creek with another store and post office.

With the construction of the Potlatch mill, the annual spring log drive on the Palouse River almost passed out of the picture. Gone also was the winter sleigh-haul of logs to the river bank. Logging now became a year-around occupation, with

rails laid into the woods and the logs hauled by train direct to the mill.

Good times returned to the country. In the Palouse Valley the farmers could transport their hay and grain to market over the railroad.

A profitable market for all the cream, eggs, fruit, garden products, and fresh meat the surrounding area could produce was found in the three boarding houses and the store at Potlatch. If a man wanted to work in the winter, or other spare time, he could usually get work either in the mill or in the woods. The many logging teams used in the camps required many tons of the timothy hay that grew well on the bottom lands along the Palouse River.

With the building of Potlatch and Harvard, which took place with the coming of the railroad, the community of Princeton was narrowed down. This circumstance, however, was offset by the increase in local settlement. Princeton, by 1906, was a full-fledged community. It had passed its infancy, left its childhood behind, and was now fully mature and able to take its place among the communities of the State.



## A HISTORY OF MOSCOW, IDAHO

by

W. G. Emery

Editor's Note: In 1896, W. G. Emery, a photographer, opened a gallery in Moscow. In 1897 he wrote A History of Moscow, Idaho, With Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Citizens, Firms and Corporations. The History was published as a supplement to the Moscow Mirror newspaper.

Latah Legacy is republishing this history in three installments, of which this is the second.

### NEWSPAPERS

Under this head we may be pardoned for dwelling somewhat on the history of Moscow's first newspaper, the Mirror. The Moscow Mirror made its advent July 4th, 1882, under the management of Ivan Chase & Co. It was a small six-column sheet with "patent" inside, and was printed at Colfax. It had a circulation of 140 copies and its subscription price was \$3.00 per annum. Shortly after its inception the Hon. Willis Sweet became associated with the paper and finally acted on the editorial staff. On the 17th day of November of the same year it passed into the hands of C. B. Reynolds, who paid as an equivalent \$400.00 for the entire plant. Under this management many changes were made. The office was in a frame building on Main street south of Fourth in the same building with the stores of Dernham & Kaufmann and M. J. Shields. The plant was improved and some important additions made in the way of type, etc. The business increased so rapidly that it was found necessary to have an office exclusively for the paper. This was accomplished by moving the plant from the building mentioned, to one on Jackson street, then in a wheat field. Mr. Reynolds continued to manage and edit the paper from Nov. 17, 1882, till June the

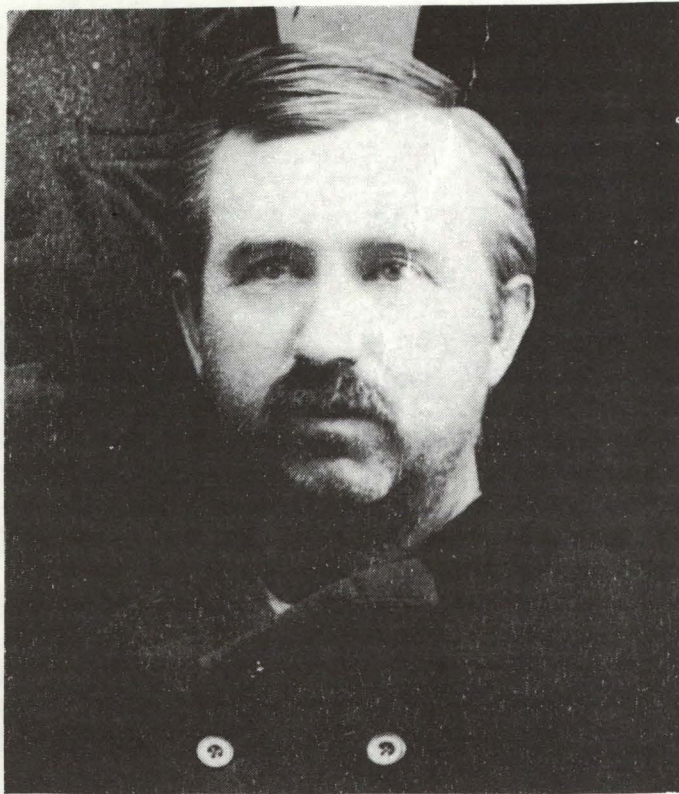
7th, 1889. The good will of the business was then purchased by the present proprietors and shortly after the plant was moved into its present quarters. Our readers will form some idea of the growth of the country and the increase of the circulation of the paper from the fact that the circulation in 1882 was 140, in 1890 was 1000 and at the present time numbers 1500. In 1882 the entire plant was purchased for \$400.00; the present value of the plant, including the brick office is \$15,000. The Mirror has done as much as any other institution to build up the city of Moscow and its efforts will be as aggressive in the future as they have been in the past. It will always be a reflection of the sentiment of the best morals, the best government, of the best people of Moscow.

Besides the Mirror there are three other live papers in our city. The North Idaho Star in its neat brick office on the southwest corner of Main and First street, as noted elsewhere, is a bright, newsy paper issued weekly. The paper is something Moscow can justly be proud of, it is democratic in politics and is ably edited and conducted by H. C. Shaver, our present postmaster. The Times-Democrat is another of our weekly papers and is owned and edited by Samuel Owings. "Sam" is a populist and his paper is the lead-



ing organ of his party in northern Idaho. The Double-Standard, edited by C. F. Lake and A. J. MacDonald, and owned by E. C. Steele, is silver republican in politics and also issued weekly. Its editorials are pungent and fearless and it has an influence that is far-reaching in our community.

To all her sister papers the Mirror extends the hand of fellowship and assures them that she is with them heart and soul in all efforts that tend to upbuild and promote the welfare of our city and sur-



C. B. Reynolds, owner of the Moscow Mirror, 1882-89. University of Idaho collection.

rounding country. A new era of prosperity is dawning upon us and we can see the golden lining of the cloud of depression that has been hovering over our agricultural pursuits and business interests for the past three years. With minor differences forgotten, let us all pull together for the upbuilding of our beautiful little city.

#### OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Moscow's first school house was built in 1878 just beyond the south Palouse. It stood over on the road north of Wm. Taylor's house and was known as the Maguire school house. In the fall of that year R. H. Barton was engaged to teach and District No. 5 was supplied with its first educational facilities. But this location was not satisfactory to the inhabitants of Moscow, it being nearly a mile from the one store the village contained, so a petition was circulated to move it in closer. It was finally decided to settle the matter by a vote to be held at the school-house as the country people did not wish to change its location as it was easier to move the town to the school house. It seemed as though their wishes would prevail as there were many more votes from the country than from the town. But Asbury Lieuellen threw off his coat and rustled around among the floating population and by running a free 'bus all day between his store and the polls, carried the election. John Russell donated a piece of ground and a new building was put up on the present location of the Russell school. It was not long though till the young and growing city found that this building was entirely too small, so among the first work of those interested in the welfare of Moscow, was the contemplation and erection of a public school capable of affording accommodation to the school children then residents of the village, making some allowance for any increase that might take place. Mr. Silas Imbler, one of Moscow's beneficent citizens donated a splendid piece of land on which to place the proposed building. The site is most centrally located in the north-eastern portion of the city. At the time of which we are writing it was admirably suited to the convenience of the residents, being equidistance from all. The new building, when finished in 1883, was capable of accommodating 120 pupils, and was thought to be of sufficient size to meet all the requirements for the next decade of years. In the meantime reports as to the richness of the country and the



productiveness of the soil began to go abroad with the result that the country began rapidly to settle us and Moscow with the neighboring district began to take the leading place in northern Idaho, so that in 1889 the trustees of the public school found it necessary to procure additional school accommodations. They immediately set to work, had plans prepared and soon

the contract was let for the erection of the present Russell school. The cost of this structure was \$16,000, making in all \$22,000 for school buildings. No pains were spared to make this school second to none in the state. In this endeavor the trustees received the hearty endorsement of the citizens of Moscow. The school furniture was all of the most modern and

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Russell School, late 1880s. LCHS collection.



improved manufacture. The interior of the building was so arranged that each department could be reached with the least possible confusion. The different rooms are so located that each grade can depart from the building without intruding on the province of, or coming in contact with members of other departments, thus avoiding the slightest confusion. This is borne out by the fact that the entire school, numbering over 400 pupils has vacated the building in less than thirty seconds. On the 3rd day of July 1890, Idaho was admitted into the Union, and since that time the state has experienced a steady increase in population. Moscow continued to keep the lead, so much so that during the seven months of the last school term of 1892, in spite of her new school building she was compelled to rent a place of worship to utilize it for a school in which to place over fifty of her children. Many thought this state of affairs would not continue longer than the end of the term but on the re-assembling of the school in the fall it was found that the same state of affairs existed, thus making it necessary for the trustees to secure another temporary building. This, at the time, was found to be impossible, so a new room was fitted up on the present site and the building on south Main street, now occupied by Emery's photograph gallery, was rented and as many children placed therein as could be accommodated. In spite, however, of the most strenuous efforts the school began again to be overcrowded. In one room alone there were 98 scholars, the entire roll being 484. It was clearly seen that one of two things had to be done. Either to overcrowd the building they had, thus making it impossible for the teachers to do justice to the children or to purchase property and erect another building to serve the purpose of a high-school. Thus taking from the Russell school those pupils who had passed the curriculum prescribed by the board and were prepared to enter a higher grade and more advanced course of study preparatory to entering an institution to which we shall shortly have occasion to make more extensive reference. They chose the

latter course, and having viewed various properties which were offered for a site for the new school building, they decided to purchase a tract on Third Street for which they paid about \$4,000. The plans had already been prepared and the contract was let for over \$20,000, exclusive of school furniture and heating apparatus. This building, as finished, is of hard brick, with a stone foundation. It is fitted up with the most modern improvements and is constructed according to the most approved principles, both for sanitary arrangements and ventilation. The heating apparatus is of the most approved plan and cost over \$3000. Although the capacity of this school is 425 pupils, the same old trouble has been worrying the trustees for the last two years. The two large school buildings have been crowded to their utmost, as well as a smaller building occupied exclusively by primary pupils. The complete roll of pupils for the present term is 50 in the primary or annex department, 400 in the Russell school and 425 in the High school, making a total of 875. The schools are divided into 11 grades, each in charge of an experienced and competent teacher. With many, the idea of a western school, is one in which the preceptors are of the poorest sort and of the lowest standard--in many cases those who, through inefficiency or inability to hold or even obtain positions in native towns, were compelled to seek their fortunes in the far west. If such a state of affairs ever did exist, we can assure our friends that that day has long since passed, never to return. The greatest care is exercised by our trustees in selecting teachers and none but those who show a mastery of the subjects essential to a sound education, and also an adaptation to teach, find a place in our public schools. The present curriculum includes the following subjects: Hygiene, physiology, physics, rhetoric, literature, geometry, algebra, botany, civil government, general history, zoology and Latin. These subjects indicate that our children are supposed to learn at least something during their attendance at school. The visitor has but to inspect the specimens of work done



by the pupils, work which is kept in the different departments for the inspection of visitors, and includes penmanship, drawing, etc., to conclude that no time is being lost and no money being needlessly spent. On the contrary the best of value is received for the expenditure. The trustees at present are R. S. Mathews, Pres., H. L. Coats, Sec., E. R. Headly, Lindol Smith, Mrs. J. H. Forney and Mrs. C. J. Orland, gentlemen and ladies whose excellent qualifications have been eminently useful in bringing the schools to such a high state of efficiency, and fit them well for these honorable and responsible positions which they occupy. Under the regime of the present superintendent, Mr. J. C. Muerman, who has held that position for the past seven years, and his efficient staff of 14 teachers, the schools have been kept in a high state of efficiency and reflect the greatest credit on the entire management. Prof. Muerman is a graduate of the normal department of Hiram college, Ohio, the alma mater of the late General Garfield, and is an instructor of unusual ability as well as a refined and courteous gentleman. He taught two years at Deerfield and four years in Portage county, Ohio, before coming to Moscow, this being his 13th

year of experience in school work. Besides acting as the superintendent he is also teacher of book-keeping and geometry and his specialty is languages and history.

Miss Nellie M. Darby is principal of the High school and has held that position for the past two years. Besides being a most estimable young lady she possesses every necessary qualification as a teacher. In addition to her other duties she is also in charge of the 11th grade. Mr. W. P. Mathews, the asst. principal is in charge of the 10th grade, and, though a new teacher, has proven himself worthy of the choice of the trustees. The other teachers and their respective departments are: A. B. Towne, 9th grade; J. D. Long, 8th grade; Miss Carrie Mitchell, 7th grade; Mrs. Emily Clayton, 6th grade; Miss Grace Rodgers, 5th grade; Miss Viola McCarter and Flora Manning, 3rd and 4th grade; Miss Rose St Clair, 2nd grade, and Miss Nellie Day and Mrs. M. L. Headington the 1st or primary grade. Lack of space forbids an extended mention of the work in the different departments and of those in charge. "By their works ye shall know them" for they all are a credit to our city and the especial field of their important work, the public schools of Moscow.



John C. Muerman, early teacher, principal, and superintendent. Woman at left is unidentified. LCHS collection.



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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 magazine and a discount on books published by the Society are included in membership dues. Dues for the various classes of membership are as follows:

Regular: \$ 5.00 (individuals); \$ 9.00 (families)  
Sustaining: \$ 25.00 (individuals); \$40.00 (families)  
Sponsoring: \$100.00  
Benefactor: \$500.00

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 Sunday. Visits to the museum or research library are welcomed at other times and can be arranged by calling (208) 882-1004.