

Wallowa History Center

Preserving Our Past for the Future

*The Wallowa History Center works to save the memories, stories,
and photographs that define the history and culture of the places we call home.*

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FLORENCE MCKENZIE MEMOIR

Florence McKenzie, the daughter of John and Jessie Doty McKenzie, was born Christmas Day 1888, four months prior to the family's move to Wallowa County from Bad Axe, Michigan. Like other pioneers, they came to obtain land and to join other family members. The following story is from memories she recorded in 1942 and 1972.

I have wondered if my parents had any misgivings in leaving familiar surroundings for the unknown, or was the spirit of adventure taking over and painting a bright picture of the future. At last, were not their dreams of a 160-acre ranch in Oregon about to be realized? Who wouldn't be thrilled. A year or so previous to this time, Father's brother, who had lived in Kansas, had gone to Oregon and taken up a homestead and was comfortably situated. When I was four months old, we boarded an emigrant train to La Grande, Oregon. Traveling by train then is not like it is now, where you have every convenience, even luxury. We rode in an emigrant train which had provisions for cooking, eating and sleeping in a coach. The furnishings were of the humblest kind. The beds did not have springs but were filled with wooden slats.

The train arrived in La Grande, Oregon, the end of the railroad but not the end of our journey. Here we boarded a heavy hack drawn by two large horses. That day we traveled about 30 miles. Our journey led us down the Wallowa Hill, over many switchbacks, until we reached Minam, a halfway station, where we were cared for until the next morning. From there we boarded another stage coach, bag and baggage, to the little town of Wallowa, where we registered at the Wallowa Hotel, which was managed by the Post family at the time.

There were not telephones and the ranchers did not get into town very often to pick up their mail. So there was no one to meet us. Father walked out to Dry Creek, and our uncle Rod McCrae came in a wagon and took us and our belongings out to Dry Creek. Father filed on 160 acres, and with the help of other settlers built a good log house and barn, and a small house for the chickens. We were not isolated as some who pioneer. My father's cousin Jennie Inman's family also lived near us. There were eight or ten families in the Dry Creek settlement and all had children of school age.



Dry Creek School, 1901. Zella Williams, teacher

The little log schoolhouse was in a grove of young pine trees across the creek from our place. The desks and the teacher's desk were hand made. I well remember the wide plank floors, the big stove in the center of the room, and a bench by the door for the water bucket and dipper. For various reasons, the school was held only three months out of the year. The teacher had to "live in" with any family who was able to keep him. Henry Oliver was the first teacher of the Dry Creek School. The little school was the scene of many programs such as spelling bees, which were the most popular. There was no organized Christian work for the people on Dry Creek but once in awhile an itinerant preacher came out our way and had services on Sunday at the little school house. Usually they were Free Methodists or United Brethren faith. Social gatherings consisted mostly of women getting together to tie quilts or sew carpet rags. I do not know where all of the rags came from, but every home had a rag carpet on the living room floor at least. They were woven in strips and sewn together to cover the room. The proud owner put down a layer of straw and then carefully tacked the carpet to the floor.

Mrs. Leonard was the little lady who wove the carpet strips in our area. Besides weaving carpet strips she was the first to visit the sick and always brought some goodies along to add cheer to her visit. I remember she used an English saddle on her horse instead of a regular stock saddle. During those first few years we lived on Dry Creek, contagious diseases made the rounds. There were mumps, measles, whooping cough and typhoid fever. I can remember one dear white-haired lady who took my baby sister in her home and cared for her when my parents were stricken with typhoid fever.

Before the coming of the settlers, Wallowa County was the Indians' hunting and fishing paradise. And for several years after we went to Oregon, they made their annual trips from Idaho and Montana through Wallowa County for hunting and fishing. It was a great sight to see them, perhaps 12 or 15 in number, on their Indian ponies riding single file, dressed in their colored blankets and feathered headdresses. The trails they made were worn down to a depth of a foot or more. I cannot think of a more beautiful sound than the tinkling of sleigh bells on a cold winter night. Our Christmas tree was usually held at the schoolhouse with a good program and simple gifts and treats of candy and apples for all.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF LOCAL REAL ESTATE DEALER

Once called "the most widely-known man in Wallowa County," Leonard Couch had a long and varied career in Wallowa. He was born in Missouri in 1867 and came to Oregon's Union County with his parents when he was nine years old. After graduating from the University of Oregon, he started the Elgin Preparatory School, became a partner with former college roommate C.T. McDaniel in establishing the *Wallowa News*, and began the Wallowa Academy, which was located in the upper story of the old Island City Mercantile and Milling building at 304 E First Street in Wallowa. Later he bought C.T. McDaniel's interest in a real estate and insurance business, becoming partners with John McDonald. In 1911, the two built a brick office on the corner of Storie and Second Street that also housed the Wallowa Forest Reserve Office and the Masonic Lodge. The same year, Mr. Couch had a new home built at 303 Holmes Street. In 1918 he formed a new partnership with A.E. Tulley, which lasted until 1924. After that he worked with his son David. Before his death in 1940, Mr. Couch served a term as Wallowa County Commissioner, and for many years was on the Wallowa School Board. On January 31, 1936, the *Wallowa Sun* printed the first of three articles called the "Autobiography of L. Couch." The following, one of the stories from the series, shows how life has changed since then.

We had all we could do by horse and buggy at that time. We had as high as three buggy loads out in one day. The biggest rush started with the sales of timberland. Some of the companies buying land were the Grande Ronde Lumber Company, the Palmer Lumber Company and the East Oregon Lumber

Company. Charles and Pat Mimnaugh were buyers for Grande Ronde Lumber, Sprague for Crossett Timber, and Spencer for Palmer Lumber. About this time, timber frauds came up for investigation, and ugly scandals cropped up all over the West. Wallowa County never had any such scandals. However, the government sent their investigators into the county but no irregularities could be unearthed. These scandals grew out of companies furnishing money to entrymen to prove up and then sell out to the company. It was not against the law for an entryman to borrow money to enter his land, provided he had not contracted with the party loaning the money to sell to him. John McDonald was one of those who sometimes loaned money to assist men who had worked for him or others whom he wished to help along. In fact, no one who ever lived in the county did so much to help newcomers to get a foothold.

I will tell you one that was not so funny to me. A big fat man came into the office one afternoon. In fact, the present snow is rather a baby compared with what was on the ground. It seemed to be evenly distributed over the ground in all parts. We always made a policy to turn no one down who wanted to see a ranch, snow or no snow. He wanted to get a stock ranch for mules and horses out where the grass was good. He had the right idea anyway, and I told him to be on hand early the next morning, and in those times early was early. I took my own team and started for the Lower Chesnimnus. The road was through Enterprise, and by the time we reached that thriving village it was time for dinner, lunch these days, but we had no lunches then; every meal was either breakfast, dinner, or supper, and one was just as substantial as another. We left Enterprise after dinner with a fresh livery team as mine had had about all they should have for one day with the snow like it was. I did not even know the road out there, but it was no trouble to find it at all.



Leonard Couch
1867-1940



Couch home in Wallowa
Couch-McDonald Building



Along about eight o'clock, we drove into the John Beggs place, which was the end of our journey, and found no one at home. It looked at first like we were rather in a bad spot. The house was not locked and so we went in and made a fire as John had plenty of dry wood. We rustled around and got something to eat, and still John did not come.

Along about eleven we went to bed, and somewhere around twelve o'clock John came in and was no more astonished to find us there than any other stockman anywhere in the county would have been when there was no place to go. He had been down to the post office to get his mail and had stayed to talk and visit with the postmaster.

There was just about two feet of snow all over the ranch, but I sold it anyway and fixed up the contract when I got back to the office. The livery made the return trip to Enterprise, and from there I had my fresh team to drive home. By the time, we reached the valley it had begun to Chinook, and eventually the snow disappeared. The place sold that day was the one afterwards owned and operated by Alvin McFetridge, who sold it a few years ago and has another place now on Joseph Creek not far from the Beggs ranch.

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*As a member you receive three free copies of
historical photographs from our archives, and
10% off your purchase of regional history books.*

The Wallowa Sun
October 21, 1915

Better Babies Score

The purpose of the better babies contest, which was held in connection with the Wallowa School Fair a week ago Friday, was not for the purpose of judging the beauty of the child, but for a physical examination so that the parents might know the defects, if there are any, in their child. The local physicians gave such information as to the better ways of caring for the child, and food which is best for it. The eugenic movement is especially beneficial to young mothers, and the examinations no doubt will assist in many ways to help the little ones to better health and happiness. The scoring of those examined follows:

Venita M Beaty	95	9-10	Brady Haneke	91	9-10
Hugh J. Hayes	95	8-10	Mary Schaeffer	91	5-10
Bernice Mille	94	8-10	Alvin Hawkins	90	9-10
Ethel Conklin	93	8-10	Enid Oliver	90	8-10
Roy Conklin	93	4-10	Russel Fleshman	89	9-10
Elwyn Clay	92	7-10	Jessie Bell	76	8-10
Roland Pound	91	6-10	Sheldon Hartzell	91	4-10

(Note: Although other articles refer to the "Better Babies Score," nothing explains the scoring procedure.)

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