

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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SPECIAL CENTENNIAL ISSUE

– 100 Years Ago –

Nell Davis Becomes First Graduate of Wallowa High School

Nell Ethyl Davis was born August 4, 1891 to Marshall and Susan Miller Davis in the Bear Creek area near Wallowa, Wallowa County, Oregon. The Davis family operated a sawmill and woodworking plant. She probably started school at a one-room school in the Bear Creek area. Mr. Davis built a home in Wallowa about 1900. The home is now owned by Bill and Colleen DeGrofft. Nell attended the Wallowa School from approximately 1900 to 1910 in the white school building that was built in 1899.

Nell was an accomplished pianist and played the piano for many functions in Wallowa during and after her high school years.

The Wallowa High School Alumni Association was formed in May of 1912, and Nell was elected as its first president.

She married Howard K. McLean on November 21, 1914 at Pendleton, Oregon. Howard McLean had come to Wallowa after the death of his mother in La Grande. He lived in Wallowa with his aunt and uncle, John and Maggie McLean McDonald. Howard and Nell were classmates at Wallowa. He entered Oregon Agricultural College (now Oregon State University) at Corvallis, Oregon in 1908 after finishing the 10th grade. Howard graduated from O.A.C. in 1912. While Howard was attending college, Nell taught piano lessons and was the organist for a Wallowa church.

After their marriage they lived in Pendleton, where Howard was employed by the Oregon Woolen Mills. In 1928 they moved to Corvallis, where Howard had an insurance agency. They had two children: Corwin, born in Pendleton; and Janet, adopted about 1928 in Corvallis.

They moved to Portland in 1934, and Howard died there in July 1937.

The following year, Nell moved back to Corvallis to become the director of Westminster House at O.S. U., which was a Presbyterian Church outreach program. She held that position from June 1938 until 1956. The announcement published when she was hired described her as “a charming little lady with grey hair and twinkling brown eyes.” Her invitation to the students was, “Come in the evening, or come in the morning, come when you are looked for, or come without warning.”

In 1956 she was honored at the dedication of the new wing of the structure when it was formally dedicated in her honor. It was called the McLean Room. A bronze plaque was placed on the structure’s fireplace as a memento of her service.



Nell Davis, 1909



Nell Davis, 1914

She was also honored in 1956 as a “Women of Achievement” by the Oregon State Chapter of Theta Sigma Phi. Mrs. McLean, who was affectionately known as “Auntie Nell,” served as housemother for the S.A. E. Fraternity for three years and as housemother for Alpha Xi Delta for one year.

“The honors I have received have overwhelmed me, for I don’t feel I merit such recognition,” she said at the Woman of Achievement banquet. “Perhaps the lesson I learned from my music teacher when I was a little girl has helped me most in my work, for she told me never to turn anyone down if they asked me to do something. ‘They wouldn’t ask you if they didn’t feel you could do it.’ I’ve always remembered this and accepted any responsibility others might give to me, and tried to live up to their faith in my ability.”

Nell died in Corvallis, September 1967 at the age of 76. She was buried at the Riverview Cemetery in Portland, Oregon.

New School Proposed

From *The Wallowa Sun*

School Board Meeting (March 11, 1910)

At the meeting of the school board Wednesday, Prof. H.H. Bronson was re-elected principal of the Wallowa Schools for next year at a salary of \$1,000. Assistants were chosen as follows: N. D. Burgoyne, sixth and seventh [grades], re-elected; Miss Minnie M. Miller second and third, re-elected; Miss Jessie A. Matlock, primary, re-elected. Miss Jennie Hayes was elected to the fourth grade and Miss Anna Strong of Mackay, Idaho was elected but grade was not specified. One vacancy remains to be filled and several more teachers, probably three additional, will be elected before school opens. Sundry bills were paid by the board and a call issued for a mass meeting for Thursday night, March 17, at 7:30 to be held at the school house to discuss the question of bonding the district to build a new schoolhouse.

Propose New School House—First Meeting (March 11, 1910)

Meeting called to Discuss Plans.

The present school contains only six rooms and the primary pupils are housed in a building wholly unfit for school purposes and away from the school grounds.

Vote Bonds (March 25, 1910)

Most patrons assembled wanted a brick school house. L. Couch, Chairman of the School Board, presided, and J.H. Mimnaugh was chosen secretary. Speeches were made in favor, and a petition was drawn up for \$20,000 of bonds. The next day it was decided to increase the bond to \$25,000 with a vote on April 9th.

Build \$20,000 School House (April 15, 1910)

Bond Carried Saturday by a vote of 76 to 50. 126 voted and 7 were women. \$5,000 for grounds, furnish the school and pay off an old bond of \$2,700.



Wallowa schoolhouse, 1910

First Commencement (May 20, 1910)

Miss Nell Davis has completed the four year program, and the first annual commencement will be held this Friday at the Methodist Church. This is quite an honor.

School House Plans Drawn (July 1, 1910)

Plans drawn by Architect S.E. Watkins were accepted and bids called for July 8, 1910



Wallowa Methodist Church, c. 1910

Wallowa School Year 1910-1911

From the *Wallowa Sun*

(The new schoolhouse was being constructed during the fall and early winter of 1910.)

(February 3, 1911)

The new high school started Monday with the enrollment of 174 students in the new structure. The Howland Contracting Co. has finished the new building. It is one of the finest school houses in the Northwest and is up to date in every respect. There were 20 high school students. Miss Strong was the Principal with Miss Williamson as the assistant. The following were teachers: N.D. Burgoyne, 7th and 8th, 40 pupils; Miss Perry, 6th grade, 34 pupils; Miss Hayes, 5th grade, 40 pupils; Miss Kooch, 4th and 3rd, 40 pupils; making 174 in the high school building. The teachers in the wooden building are Miss Miller, 2nd grade, 30 pupils; and Miss Post 1st grade with 20 pupils, making a total enrollment of 225 pupils. The completed building and furnishings cost the district \$23,800 which is a credit to the city as well as the present school board.

(May 12, 1911)

A class play, "Graduation at Wood Hill School," was presented in the school auditorium. Music was provided by the Tulley Orchestra. The cast included Stewart Tulley, Ermil Rich, Lillian Johns, Mona Dougherty, Ralph Hamilton, Edith Fisher, Lulu McNees, Leo Couch, and Harold Curtiss.



New Wallowa schoolhouse under construction, early 1911

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(May 19, 1911)

Second Class Graduated, Exercises Instructive and Entertaining Held Thursday Evening, May 11, 1911. Three Received Diplomas: Misses Mona Dougherty, Edith Fisher and Lillian Johnson.

Thursday night of last week witnessed the graduating exercises of the second class of the Wallowa High School. The three students proved themselves eminently qualified for the honors they received. Miss Fisher's oration, "Progression," was so well prepared and delivered that it was easily in the collegiate class; Miss Dougherty's paper on "The Early History of Wallowa" showed scholarly research and study; Miss John's valedictory address, "Music," instilled some very interesting thoughts into a subject usually a tiresome ordeal in a school program. The singing by the high school chorus was a treat to all.

L. Couch in presenting the diplomas gave council for their guidance that may well be heeded. A piano duet by Mona Dougherty and Anna Shell and selections by the Tulley Orchestra were other excellent numbers on the program. All three of the graduates will attend college next year. Wallowa has reason to be proud of these graduates as each possesses ambition and ability.

(May 26 1911)

Professor H. H. Bronson has resigned as superintendent of the Wallowa School. He has been at this position for 3 years and will take a position at Oakland, Oregon. He stated his health problems as the reason for his move. He was hired in April of 1908.



H.H. Bronson

Wallowa School Year 1911-1912

From the *Wallowa Sun*

September 15, 1911

School Opened Monday, Buildings Put in Sanitary Condition Throughout

The enrollment is 268, and the high school starts off with 37, primary grades 48. The high school this year is under the guidance of Principal Roy Conklin formerly of Cove, and assisted by J.J. Beaty of Ontario schools. The other teachers are Miss Strong, who was with the school here last year and has 8th grade with 29 pupils; Miss Martin of the seventh comes from Sumpter schools where she was a successful teacher. She has 38 students. The 6th and 5th grades are taught by Miss Jennie Hayes, who was one of our successful teachers last year. She has 48 students. The 4th grade is taught by Mrs. Perry; she has 28 students in her care. The 3rd grade is taught by Miss Sills of Cove, and she has 35 pupils. The 1st grade is in the charge of Miss Post, who has 45 little tots. Prof Conklin states that the high school has practically doubled over last year's attendance and estimates that by the time they get down on a good working basis there will be 50 pupils taking the high school courses. Assistant Principal J.J. Beaty has organized a football team and practice has already begun. The outlook for a strong team is good. Other athletics will be put on in the near future.

October 6, 1911

First football game of the year against Joseph. The score was Joseph 3, Wallowa 0.

November 24, 1911

Happenings Around the Schoolhouses

First literary program of the high school was given last Friday afternoon. Programs will be given every two weeks and anyone is welcome to attend. Basketball practice has begun. Both a girls' team and a boys' team are working out every day on the courts in the school building. There will be a party honoring the freshman next Friday evening given by the three upper classes. The Bridges Brothers will organize a music class on Tuesday Dec. 5 in the auditorium. The English classes of the high school have begun a study of the classics for the first semester. Our second football team will play Lostine on the athletic field Friday afternoon. A night school will soon be organized. Handball is becoming very popular; the two courts are always in use. Electric lights have been put in the high school and the eighth grade room. There will be no school next week as all the teachers are going to Baker to attend institute. The teachers from Wallowa County will take the train to Baker. Two extra coaches will be required for the trip.

December 8, 1911

Wallowa District has 469 pupils. The largest number of school children in the county. There are 240 boys and 229 girls.

January 12, 1912

Basketball games with both boys and girls held at the Morelock Opera House. The teams played Enterprise on Saturday evening. Girls score was tied at 8-8 and Enterprise won in overtime. A rough game was played by the boys with Enterprise winning 27-16.

February 9, 1912

Students are preparing for the county debates to be held in April. The topic is Governor West's "Prison Reform Policy is Right."



Wallowa High School, c. 1912

April 12, 1912

High School Production Pleases Many. Pupils Distinguished Themselves, Instructors Improve Talent and Audience Enjoys Opera.

The production of the comic opera H.M.S. Pinafore under the direction of M.E. Robinson was well received both Monday and Tuesday nights, The big Opera House was well filled. The production was under the auspices of the high school and the neat sum of \$24.40 was added to the second piano fund. This together with the valuable training the pupils received speaks well for the enterprises of Prof. Conklin and his assistants. Also appearing were W.G. Trill, local attorney, and other staff members. There were 42 students appearing.

May 2, 1912

Victory Perches on the Wallowa Banner. High School Debaters Win.

Affirmative team at Wallowa was George Richards and Eva Hayes against David Reavis and Charles Rodgers. At Enterprise the Negative team was Helen Bratton and Anna Shell. They successfully refuted Nina Miller and Mr. Flemming. The final score was 8-0 Wallowa's favor.

May 10, 1912

Ralph Lorenz was the winner chosen to represent Wallowa in the Eastern Oregon Oratory debate in Baker City. His subject was "The Ballot, the People's Prerogative." Contestants were George Richards, "Builders of the Nation"; Miss Eva Hayes, "Aaron Burr"; Karl Hendricks, "The Indian"; Flora Allen, "The Negro."

May 17, 1912

County Track and Field Meet held in Wallowa. WCHS 79, Joseph 12, Lostine 1, and Wallowa 39. Students participating were George Richards, Stewart Tulley, Ermil Rich, Karl Hendricks, Ralph and Frank Southwick.

May 17, 1912

Third Class Graduated, Exercises Held Monday evening May 13th in the high school auditorium. Three Received Diplomas. Misses Lulu McNees, Marie Mitchell, and George Richards

The exercise opened with a few well chosen remarks by Prof. Conklin, followed by a piano solo. Miss McNees' oration "Women's Sphere" dealt with the part women take in the vocation of life, taking her duties from the pilgrims time down to the present, and dealt on the special work they are taking, such as presidents of the leading school to domestic science, and it was so well prepared and delivered that it was easily in the collegiate class. George Richard's oration on "Builders of the Nation" showed deep thought and was a well prepared delivery. He took the pilgrims from the time of landing of the Mayflower through their hardships and privations of the first few years on down through the Revolution, when they gained their liberty from the Mother County, England. Marie Mitchell's paper was on the "Bridge of Gods." It was well prepared and showed scholarly research. Chief Multnomah and his daughter Wallula were the center of the plot of the oration, showing the early tradition and religious beliefs of the Indian of the plains and the Willamette Valley. Union County Superintendent made the class address. Edwin Marvin, President of the School Board, presented the diplomas.

The Alumni Program

The W.H.S. A.A. held its first annual meeting and banquet on Tuesday evening May 14. The following program was given: Music, Tulley Orchestra; essayist, Lulu McNees; solo, Anna Shell; poet, Marie Mitchell; solo Stewart Tulley; orator, George Richards; musician, Mona Dougherty; prophet, Lillian Johns; duet, Anna Shell and Stewart Tulley; Anna M Strong remarked on the work of the association. The association then adjourned to The Stuttaford, where a delightful banquet was served. The following gave toasts: Anna M. Strong, Lillian Johns, Mona Dougherty, and George Richards. After-dinner speeches were given by Prof. Conklin, C.T. McDaniel, L. Couch and Mr. Beatty. The officers elected for the ensuing year are Nell Davis, President; George Richards, vice president; Lillian Johns, secretary; Marie Mitchell, Treasurer.