

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.*

– Newsletter Number 16 • June 2011 –

Childhood Memories of Forrest Carpenter (Part II)

By Forrest Carpenter

Backward, turn backward O time, in your flight,
Make me a child again just for tonight!
– Elizabeth Akers Allen

The winter of 1916-17 brought cold weather and an unusual amount of snow to eastern Oregon in general and to Wallowa County in particular. Robert (Bob) Warren Carpenter came into the world on February 4, 1917, while the family was snowbound at the Sled Springs Ranger Station, some 20 miles from the nearest doctor at the town of Wallowa. Fortunately, Mother had the foresight to arrange for a midwife to be on hand. Dr John B. Gregory made a valiant effort to come via horse-drawn sleigh from Wallowa but could not make it until three days after Bob was born. He found a healthy, robust boy and decided his services were not needed. Congratulation only was in order.

Even as a small boy, Jack was full of mischief and was often responsible for getting his siblings into trouble. One summer, before Bob was born, Jack and I had been given a bath and dressed in our Sunday clothes and were waiting for Mother and Dad to go to some social gathering at Flora. While we were waiting, we wandered up the road to the “woodpecker tree” which stood in the middle of the road as a pillar to the entrance to the ranger station. Somehow Jack had got hold of some matches and decided that we should burn the brush piles that remained from some timber-harvesting project. When the fires began to flair up, I decided we had done something bad and rushed home to tell the folks that we had made a big fire. Imagine



Jack and mother Edythe



Forrest and father Louis

the consternation which arose when the forest ranger, whose responsibilities included the prevention of fires, learned that his sons had set the forest on fire. Needless to say, we did not go anyplace that day and were assigned a lonely vigil in the woodshed. Dad had to spend several hours bringing the fire under control. I often wondered how he reported the facts to the Forest Supervisor!

Mother spent a great deal of time during the early years in reading to her children. Our supply of books was very limited, and what we had was of very poor quality by present-day standards, but she would patiently read them time after time and we never tired of listening.



Louis with pack string at Sled Springs

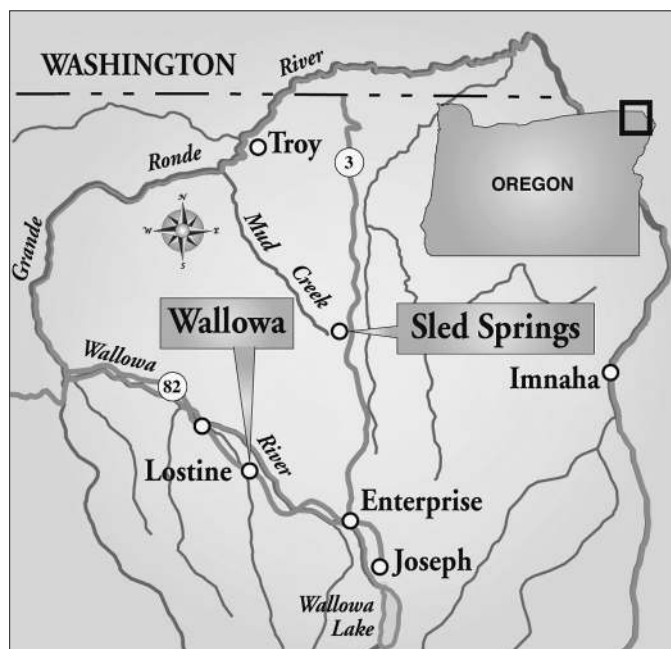
In the early years, prior to the advent of the automobile, horses provided the only means of transportation in the rural areas, either by horseback or horse-drawn conveyance. It wasn't long after we learned to walk that Jack and I learned to ride. We had two Appaloosa ponies, Blaze and Snip. The Appaloosas were horses bred by the Nez Perce Indians—original inhabitants of the Wallowa Valley—and are characterized by splotches of color on their rumps. Blaze was a bay with white splotches, and Snip was a gray with black splotches.

Blaze was named because of the white splash on her face. She was the larger of the two and was even-tempered and easy to manage. Snip, on the other hand, was well-named because of her mischievous and annoying attitude. She always played hard-to-catch as though she were testing our fortitude. She was a sucker, however, if you approached her with a pail of oats. The sight of the pail induced her to come running and, as she ate, she gladly accepted the halter or bridle admirably until she was again released.

Our first home in Wallowa had a large garden plot, an orchard of apple, pear, and pie-cherry trees, and strawberry and raspberry patches. The garden was planted each year with virtually every type of vegetable that the climate permitted. We raised many cabbages, and we filled a large crock each fall with shredded cabbage for sauerkraut. The cabbage shredder was a wicked instrument and possibly accounted for some blood in the crock from damaged fingers. Before winter, Dad would take the remaining cabbage, dig a deep trench, and bury the cabbage heads, leaving only the tips of the roots showing. This was, of course, before the age of freezers, and fruits and vegetables were generally preserved by canning. I had the onerous chore of peeling apples for apple butter but the end result was mighty good!

We had a chicken house and pen and a barn with a good-sized pasture. We had “old cow” and chickens and, occasionally, a hog, so we always had plenty to eat. We had no refrigeration facilities, and the milk was strained through cheesecloth into large, round, aluminum pans. The cream would rise to the top. It was then skimmed and any cream not immediately used was allowed to sour. The sour cream was eventually converted to butter.

In the days prior to the advent of radio and television, we children spent the major share of our leisure hours in outdoor activities. Like all you boys, we were obsessed with hunting and fishing. Our first weapons were so-called “slingshots,” which projected rocks or other missiles at unsuspecting targets, most notably the Franklin ground squirrels that were abundant in the Sled Springs area. On one occasion, I landed a rock on a squirrel from a considerable distance, and constantly bored my siblings with the details. Next we graduated to BB guns, a more lethal weapon. We waged a campaign against English sparrows, but to our shame every animal that flew or walked or ran was considered to be fair game.





Wallowa Presbyterian Church

While Dad was not an active church person, Mother was very actively engaged in church activities and encouraged our regular attendance at Sunday school. We lived just up the street from the Presbyterian Church and were baptized in that church. Mother taught Sunday school, sang in the choir, and participated in Ladies Aid. Because we were older, we regularly attended Christian Endeavour on Sunday evenings.

Christmas and Easter were always joyous occasions. The church had a well-decorated Christmas tree, a Santa Claus, and treats for everyone. Every child, even the toddlers, had to memorize a Christmas “piece,” which was presented to the audience just prior to the arrival of Santa.

On one particular gorgeous Christmas Eve with a foot or more of new-fallen snow, word came during the festivities that the minister’s house had burned to the ground. The joys of the moment quickly disappeared.

Wallowa Sun
December 30, 1926

Presbyterian Manse Goes Up In Flames.

The home of Rev. W.F. Shields of Wallowa was completely destroyed by fire which broke out at 7:30 on Christmas Eve. Mr. Shields was in Lostine officiating at the Christmas Program in the Presbyterian Church at that place and Mrs. Shields was assisting with the Presbyterian Christmas program in Wallowa. Some difficulty was experienced with the fire fighting apparatus. The engine, which had been kept in a small shed, was cold and would not respond readily. Water hydrants and hose were frozen so that it was hard to get sufficient stream on the fire to check the blaze. The house and contents were completely destroyed.

I believe that the elementary and high schools were of excellent quality for a small town, and we received a well-rounded education in the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. My eighth-grade teacher, Kate Johnson (Goebel) was excellent, and with her help and guidance I was able to attain the highest overall score in the county-wide eighth-grade examinations.



Kate Goebel

Wallowa Sun
July 22, 1922

New Powwatka Road Started This Week

This new road will not follow the old road. It will follow along the logging railroad past the Fishers Ranch House. The new road will eliminate the heavy grades of the old road. The steepest grade will be 4.8 percent and the maximum curve will be 30 degrees. The counties portion will cost \$44,500. The Forest Service part is about 11 miles and will be completed next year. The right of way has been donated by the land owners. The builder is Johnson Construction Co. of Portland.

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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.*

Wallowa Sun
August 19, 1915

Organized Fire Company

Night Marshall Ashley got the young men of Wallowa together and partly perfected an organization for fire fighting, which will be organized this evening. There are three hose cart stations in the city, and it is the desire of all citizens that there be a company organized for each one of these stations—one for the east end of Main Street, one close to the school house, and one at Brownlee's Cash Store in the northwest part of town. Those signing up were: Fred Ashley, Ross Hood, Ralph Couch, Wallace Baird, Harold Mahar, Curtis Burton, Orville McKenzie, Kenneth Hall and George Rogers. There will be practice again this evening and hope to get a lot more recruits to join.

Wallowa Sun
October 28, 1915

A Good Run

Last Thursday evening the two fire companies were out for a practice run. The night marshal built a small blaze on the vacant lot west of the Presbyterian Church, turned in an alarm as a signal for the boys to start to see which company could get water on the blaze first. No. 2 Company from the Brownlee station were the winners. getting coupled up and turning water on the blaze first. Of course No. 1 was to a certain extent at a disadvantage as their run was slightly up grade, but the boys took their defeat good naturedly and say "It can't be done again." We understand that another run will be made again in the near future to keep the companies in practice. The rivalry between the two companies is good and it will be the means by which we will have a good fire fighting bunch of laddies if the occasion ever arises that we need them.

Special thanks to Wayne Johnson for donating the space for the Wallowa History Center.