

WALLOWA QUARTERLY

Newsletter of the Wallowa History Center
Preserving Our Past for the Future

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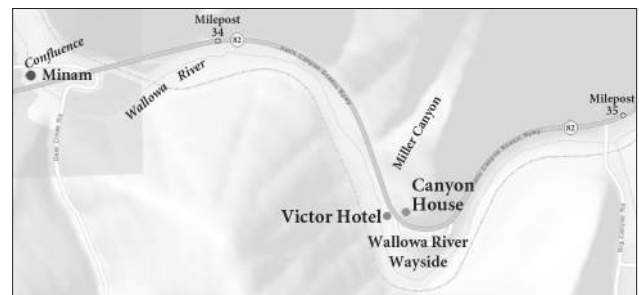
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Wallowa Canyon Hotels

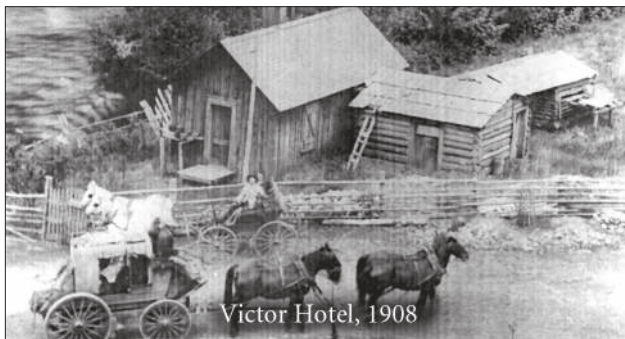
The old stagecoach route between Elgin and Wallowa—up Fishtrap Hill, across Cricket Flat, down Wallowa Hill, and then through the Wallowa Canyon—was such a difficult trip for both horses and passengers that the journey usually required two days, with an overnight stop along the way. In the earlier stagecoach days, this stop was at Minam, where the Minam and Wallowa rivers join, but later it moved up the Wallowa River, less than three miles from the rivers' confluence. The two hotels that did business in the canyon from approximately 1900 until the train came in 1908 were the Victor Hotel and the Canyon House.

The history of both hotels, however, is obscure: Their beginnings, their exact locations, and even their names are difficult to establish. The Canyon House, for example, was also known as the Canyon Hotel, the Hotel Reavis, and the Reavis House; and the grandson of the founders and owners of the Victor Hotel said that the name of the business was the “Canyon Hotel,” while his grandfather referred to it as the “commonly-known Victor place.” Nevertheless, both hotels almost certainly were neighbors, doing business at nearly the same time from the same general location.



Victor Hotel

The Frank Victors were caretakers of the Graham toll bridge and hotel at Minam in 1897, and they later started their own business in the canyon, [when in about 1900] they moved onto a claim filed by their son, Lester, where they again kept travelers. Lester took title to his land in 1905. They sold a right-of-way to the railroad in 1905 and 1906. Lester's land was closer [than Frank Victor's land] to Big Canyon. The properties probably joined on the west. (Adapted from Irene Barklow, *Gateway to the Wallowas*, 2003)



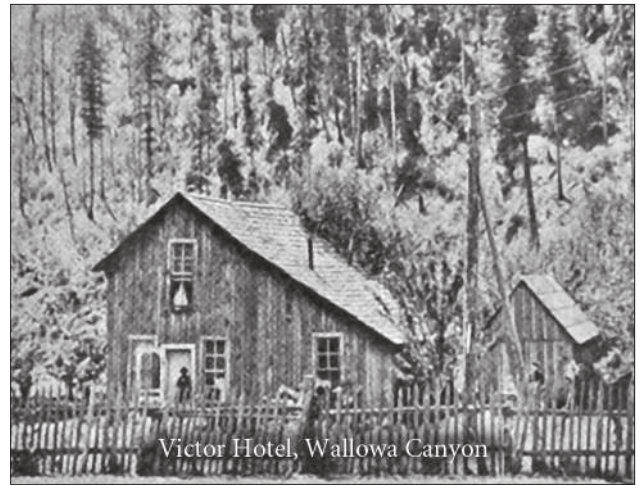
Lester Victor, son of Frank Victor of Wallowa Canyon, was pronounced insane this week by an examining board consisting of Judge Henry and Dr. M.K. Hall. The unfortunate young man is 25 years of age and first showed signs of insanity Saturday while at the depot waiting for the departure of the Elgin train. His father and brother were with him up to Wednesday evening, when he was taken to Salem by one of the regular asylum attendants. (*La Grande Chronicle*, December 28, 1906)

The [Victor Hotel was on] the homestead of Lester Victor, son of the present occupants [his parents]. He now lives in Wyoming. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Victor will move in the spring to the top of Smith Mountain, a little north and very much above their present home. Mr. Victor has 1,120 acres of land, most of which is on top of the mountain. When the family moves out of the old house, it is likely to be abandoned and go the way of the other reminders of the staging days. (*Enterprise Record Chieftain*, February 5, 1914)

When I came to Oregon in 1887, I bought out the “squatter rights” of Henry Beidler back on the Eads’ Meadows, and in 1897 moved to the toll bridge which crossed the Wallowa River at the present site of Minam. The old hotel into which we moved was located on the banks of the river adjacent to the present site of Minam and afforded the only signs of civilization in the flat where Minam now peacefully rests by the Wallowa.

We lived here two years and took in transient travelers and people going through the canyon who were unable to make the entire trip from Elgin to Wallowa due to slow modes of travel and poor roads. At that time, the road ran up through the canyon much the same way it goes now, except that in most places it followed higher up the hill than the new highway and led over large boulders and up and down into treacherous little ravines.

In 1899 we went back to the homestead where we lived for one year and then moved back to the canyon to the commonly known “Victor place,” three miles east of Minam. There we kept travelers. It was not so close to Wallowa then. In those days, Wallowa was about half the size it is now, but the roads were rough and difficult to get over. (Frank Victor, as told to Carl Gregory, *The Wallowa Sun*, August 2, 1928)



Victor Hotel, Wallowa Canyon

Canyon House

Canyon House was located at the site of the state highway crest stop [Wallowa River Wayside], as was the Victor place...It is difficult to find information about this lodging place. It was a favorite stopping place for travelers between Wallowa County and Elgin. Also unknown is the time frame in which this wayside operated. (Adapted from Irene Barklow, *Gateway to the Wallowas*, 2003)

In staging days, the old station in the canyon had a great reputation for hospitality. The meals served by Mrs. Bert Woods were a joy to the traveler, and there always was room for one more, no matter how full the house was. The station was known as the Reavis House, and the buildings are still standing, on a bit of comparatively level ground above the river, with the primeval forest still about them. (*Enterprise Record Chieftain*, November 19, 1914)



Canyon House or Hotel Reavis, c. 1902



Stagecoach and passengers at the Canyon House

R.H. Jonas, Editor

The history of Wallowa is largely contained within the pages of its venerable early newspapers: first in *The Wallowa News*, established in 1899; but mostly in its successor, *The Wallowa Sun*, which R.H. Jonas founded in 1906, then owned, edited, and published from 1907–1912 and again from 1929–1931. During the *Sun*'s life, which lasted into 1942, Jonas was arguably the most outspoken and certainly the most interesting editor throughout the newspaper's long run. He never feared to take a stand on any issue that affected the town, and he asked only that readers think before responding.

"It is ever our policy to give the news accurately and without fear or favor and to give everyone a square deal," he explained in a 1908 *Sun*. "Our editorials, however, are our own opinions. We consider them carefully before we print them, and we would ask our readers that they consider them carefully before they criticize what we say."

The same passion he had for the issues facing Wallowa extended to his continual and constant promotion of the town—called "boosterism" or "upbuilding" in his day—and he often admonished those who didn't share that passion.

"It is to be regretted that more interest is not taken in the work of upbuilding of the town," he wrote in a 1909 editorial. "Such work cannot be accomplished until the merchants and property holders come to the feeling that they have a common interest, and that every man who owns property or does business in the town is interested in the upbuilding of the town."

Part of that "upbuilding" involved promoting the "big mill" that operated in Wallowa under three different owners from 1909 until 1964, when the effects of a labor strike closed it.

"Not long ago a man told me he could remember when good clear lumber could be bought for \$6 per thousand [board feet]," he wrote in 1909. "Why can't you get it for that now? The big mills have created a demand for Oregon lumber, and the price has doubled and more. The big mill [Nibley-Mimnaugh] has advertised the county, and there is a demand for logged-off lands. Industries will follow the passing of the forest, and the big mill will bring continued prosperity long after its own usefulness has vanished."

At various times during his career, Jonas was listed as a principal in the Lostine school, a superintendent in Wallowa, and even a football coach whose Wallowa team was "playing clean football, and the unnecessary roughness that characterizes so many players is entirely absent from the team." Yet as the years passed, it became increasingly clear that, more than anything else, R.H. Jonas was a newspaperman who seemed to love the town he covered.



* * *

The Sun is the name of a newspaper started by R.H. Jonas at Lostine, Wallowa County. Professor Jonas graduated from Ashland Normal [today's Southern Oregon University] last June, and during the summer was employed on the reportorial staff of the *Portland Oregonian*. He is also principal of the Lostine school. (*Oregon Teachers' Monthly*, Volume 11, 1906)

Prof. R.H. Jonas has purchased the Lostine *Ledger-Democrat* and will move it to Wallowa at once. It will be known as the *Gate City Sun*. (*The Wallowa News*, December 28, 1906)

In 1922 the *Central Oregonian* was purchased by R. H. Jonas, born in Kansas in 1881, who has had a long career in Oregon journalism since his start on the *Medford Success*. Later he worked on the *Chewaucan Post* at Paisley, the *Lakeview Examiner*, *Klamath Falls Herald*, *Valley Record* at Ashland; then took over the *Wallowa Sun* as publisher (1907), the *Beaverton Times* (1919), was partner with A. E. Scott in the *News-Times* at Forest Grove (1920-22), selling to his partner and buying the *Central Oregonian* that year. (George Stanley Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, 1939)

From *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual*, 1909:

Sun established: 1906 [first issue 1907] • Pages: 4 [sheets = 8 pages] • Size: 17 x 21 inches

Subscription price: \$1.00 per year • Circulation: 650

Crime & Punishment

From *The Wallowa Sun* (1918, 1919, 1937)

The Crime

Charles Brown was shot twice in the back from ambush at his Smith Mountain home Sunday morning while unloading hay into his barn. The two shots were fired from a clump of brush about 75 yards distant. The first shot struck Mr. Brown under the left shoulder blade and lodged in his neck. It was removed after reaching the hospital. The second shot hit him in the middle of the back close to his spine, and so far has not been removed.

After being shot at the second time, he considered someone was trying to get him, so he slid off the load of hay on the opposite side of the barn from which the shooting came, and took across the meadow on an old road leading to the Noregaard place, where Mr. Noregaard hitched up a team and started for town with Mr. Brown. In the meantime, Dr. Gregory had been telephoned for and met the patient on the way in.

Sheriff Rinehard and Prosecuting Attorney Fairchild hurried to the scene of the shooting a little after noon and gathered as much evidence as they could. On Monday they made a trip to Promise and placed Ernest and Waldo Southwick, two brothers, under arrest on two warrants charging them with cattle stealing and attempted murder.

Last Friday the two boys sold to A.B. Hall three head of cattle. Mr. Hall questioned them as to where they got the cattle when he saw the CB brand on them, and they said they had bought them from Charley Brown about a month ago. The two are having a preliminary hearing.

Waldo, the younger of the two, has confessed to both crimes. Waldo stated in part as follows: That they went to the Brown farm intending to kill him. That Brown did not have any relatives in this section of the country and that the crime would not be found out. That they would dispose of the rest of Brown's cattle, 65 or 70 head, and make a nice little stake. He admitted shooting at Brown twice with a .22-caliber pistol, while Ernest shot twice with a .41-caliber from behind a big tree about 40 or 50 yards distant.

Today, the officers took Waldo out where they had cached the two pistols, and he told them where they stood behind the tree. They will be bound over to the grand jury, and as it is doubtful if they can give the necessary bond, they will have to be confined in the county jail until the court sits. (September 26, 1918)

The Punishment

In the case of the State of Oregon vs. Ernest E. and Waldo Southwick for cattle stealing, Ernest was found guilty as charged, and Waldo was acquitted. Another case was called against the two boys at once for the shooting of C.W. Brown. This case is on trial today. (February 27, 1919)

Judge Knowles in the District Court sitting at Enterprise this week sentenced Ernest Southwick to an indeterminate prison term of from five to ten years for the shooting of Charles W. Brown, and from one to five years on the cattle-stealing charge. His brother Waldo was acquitted on both charges. (March 6, 1919)

The Escape

Ernest Southwick was taken to [the state prison in] Salem on March 13, and a short time later was transferred to the state hospital for treatment of an illness. With him was Dave Bricheaux, who had been convicted of killing an Ontario stockman and throwing the body in the Snake River. The two made their escape from the hospital, and later Bricheaux gave himself up after he alleged Southwick knocked him in the head and left him for dead in a pile of driftwood. (August 26, 1937)

The Capture

Ernest Southwick, for 18 years sought as an escaped convict from the state prison at Salem, Monday was arrested in Boise, Idaho, and yesterday returned to Salem. He was convicted from Wallowa County when 20 years old on a charge of assault with intent to kill Charley Brown on West Grossman, September 22, 1918. For this crime, both he and his younger brother Waldo were arrested, and following trial at Enterprise, Ernest was convicted while Waldo was acquitted. Following his escape, Ernest entered the army and served for two years, finally returning to Idaho, and when arrested Monday it was learned he had a wife and two children at Meridian. (August 26, 1937)

Ask the Wallowa History Center

Where was Wallowa's Mill Street?

This week J.C. Baird moved into his new \$6,000 residence on upper Mill Street, John Langmo, the contractor, having finished the building and turned over the keys. – The Wallowa Sun, September 26, 1918

Mill Street was located where Highway 82 now lies south of town. It ran from its intersection with First Street near the bridge, and past where the old Wallowa Roller Mill once stood—almost certainly the reason for its name—and from there to the city limits near its intersection with Sherod Road.

Before there was a Mill Street, however, the area had already played a prominent role in the early history of Wallowa. It lay near the riverfront edge of the 160-acre homestead claim of Lucien J. Cole, the site from which the town would eventually grow. On the roadway's western side stood Cole's cabin, the first house in what would eventually become Wallowa. Nearby were the area's first general store and first blacksmith shop, a collection of buildings sometimes referred to as "Coleville." As time went by, the eastern side would become home to a flour mill, a creamery, a city park, and the town's first electrical turbine, which provided street lights to Wallowa as early as 1901.



Mill Street Timeline

- 1876** Lucien Cole files on 160-acre homestead along Wallowa River, part of which will become Wallowa townsite.
- 1878** Cole builds cabin on claim.
- 1885** Cole sells half-acre of claim on which "Coleville" is founded; this is located approximately across from the site of what will one day be the flour mill, and it consists of a general store and a blacksmith shop.
- 1888** Cole pays off \$6.00 balance owed on homestead land.
- 1889** Cole sells homestead claim; one day later, it is resold to the Island City Mercantile and Milling Company (ICM&M), which surveys and plats the town of Wallowa.
- 1894** ICM&M builds flour mill on land that formerly belonged to Lucien Cole.
- 1896** ICM&M dedicates to the public the streets and alleys of the surveyed Wallowa townsite.
- 1897** ICM&M sells flour mill to Wallowa Mercantile Company.
- 1899** City of Wallowa incorporated; first city elections held.
- 1901** Wallowa Mercantile begins using turbine at its flour mill to produce electric lights in town.
- 1907** Cole cabin torn down. Blue Mountain Creamery opens near flour mill.
- 1922** City park established on east side of Mill Street near river.
- 1960** Wallowa Roller Mill torn down.

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Wallowa History Center

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Newsletter Update

The “undated” photograph of Wallowa Lake’s fish screen that appeared in the Spring 2019 newsletter was probably taken in 1935, the year the first screen was installed at the lake. This came after 15 years of haggling over it—the public wanted it, the irrigators didn’t want to pay for it. Finally, a combination of state and federal funding resulted in the lake’s first screen to protect salmon.

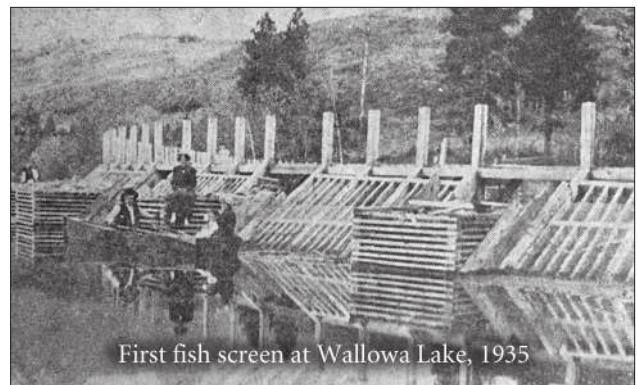
Wallowa Lake Fish Screen

From *The Wallowa Sun* (January 10, 1935)

The effort of the Wallowa County Sportsmen’s League has at last won their fight for a screen at the head of Wallowa Lake. For the last 15 years or more, the boys fought for an appropriation from the State Game Commission for the purpose of installing a screen at Wallowa Lake to hold the fish from leaving the lake and down the irrigating ditches.

The fight is now won, and credit is due all the towns along the valley for the assistance given in bringing pressure to bear on the commission for the necessity of the screen.

The commission voted \$2,000 for this purpose, and the money will go toward buying materials, and SERA [State Emergency Relief Association, a Depression-era program] labor to match it will make a project costing in labor and materials about \$4,000. This will make a permanent screen and end the long, hard fight.



First fish screen at Wallowa Lake, 1935