

WALLOWA QUARTERLY

Newsletter of the Wallowa History Center

Preserving Our Past for the Future

SINCE 2001

WINTER 2020

ISSUE 35

IN THIS ISSUE

Wallowa's Wrestler • Injured Shepherd • Wallowa Townsite • Pharmacy Fountain • Morelock Building • New Construction

Wallowa's Wrestler

Jim Noregaard (1889-1983)

By Mark Highberger

Part 1 of 2

Noregaard set the pace, which was so fast it simply blinded the Carnival wrestler...All through the contest, Noregaard was the more aggressive and appeared to be the stronger and most scientific wrestler. – La Grande Observer, September 4, 1917

As the years began pushing past the First World War and toward the Roaring Twenties, folks in Wallowa may not have done much roaring—but they did do their share of clapping and cheering.

“The Wallowa fans,” reported a 1917 issue of *The Wallowa Sun*, “were loud in the cheers and praise for their home man, which were loudest during the last seven minutes of the bout, when at times it was almost deafening as they were cheering him on to victory.”



Jim Noregaard

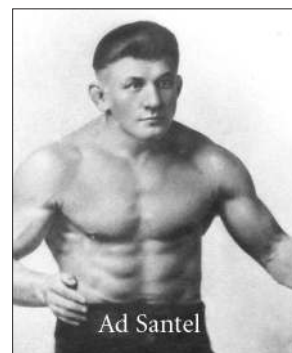
The occasion for the cheering was a professional wrestling match held at McLean's Theatre in November 1917. One wrestler was Ad Santel, a one-time world light-heavyweight champion. The other wrestler, the “home man” being cheered so loudly, was Wallowa's own Jim Noregaard. And on this night, he did not disappoint the crowd.

“The big wrestling match held in McLean's Theatre on Monday evening was won by James Noregaard of Wallowa,” the *Sun* reported in November of that year. “Ad Santel, the undisputed 175-pound champion, failed to throw Noregaard four times in an hour, the handicap. The match was clean and fast throughout. Noregaard showed great skill in defensive wrestling all the time, breaking the arm-scissors hold several times. The seating capacity of the theatre was taxed with both men and women. Fans were present from Joseph, Enterprise, Lostine, Elgin, La Grande, and Cove.”

Full houses at wrestling matches were common in Wallowa, as well as in other fledgling towns throughout the West. In fact, from the post-war years and into the Great Depression, wrestling was one of the most popular professional sports in the country, following only baseball and boxing. It was also a mainstay of evening entertainment across the region.

Keep in mind, however, that this form of wrestling was legitimate, genuine, not the scripted, fixed matches for which the “sport”—some prefer to call it “theater”—is known today. Wrestling wouldn't make that sharp turn into show business until the mid-1920s. Instead, this was, as the *Sun* put it, “one of the clean sports.”

It was also a demanding one that pitted trained athletes against each other in a variety of makeshift venues across small-town America. Through the years in Wallowa, these venues included the Schiffler Building, Morelock's Opera House, the Knights of Pythias hall, the school gymnasium and, especially,



Ad Santel

McLean's Theatre—successor to the Opera House as the town's entertainment center, where Duncan McLean often hosted matches as the second half of a double-feature that followed a "moving picture." People lined up for the movie and the wrestling, with the largest crowds coming to see Jim Noregaard wrestle.

Born in 1889, James Luther Noregaard found his way to the mat early. He was already wrestling professionally in 1911 at the age of either 21 or 22, and in 1915 one of the earliest feature newspaper articles about him pointed out that he was already a seasoned veteran.

"Saturday evening after the moving pictures, there will be a wrestling match between Chas. Armon of Enterprise and J.L. Noregaard of Wallowa," *The Wallowa Sun* reported in October of 1915. "Both men have had plenty of experience and training on the mat. No doubt there will be a big house to witness this match."

An evening spent at one of Noregaard's matches promised hours of entertainment. Typically, a professional wrestling match involved more than wrestling. Lots more. Besides the "picture show" that might precede the main bout, there often came a series of "preliminaries," not only boxing matches between "young men of the vicinity," but also musical numbers, other wrestling matches, and even "mixed bouts between a boxer and a wrestler." Furthermore, women were encouraged to attend the matches.

"The promoters are arranging two good preliminaries of local talent and will also have some music," the *Sun* announced in late 1917. "Ladies are assured of courteous treatment and are especially invited."

All this came with the price of admission, which could vary according to the reputation of the wrestlers and the importance of the match.

"Owing to the heavy expense of bringing high-class wrestlers here and building good, comfortable seats so everyone has a good view of the mat," one local promoter explained, "the price of ringside seats in the first row has been slightly advanced."

Yet in places such as Wallowa, it was still affordable. For example, in an age when the average hourly wage in the U.S. was 22 cents, and when a loaf of bread cost 7 cents and a gallon of gas 15 cents—wages were often lower and prices higher in Wallowa than the national average—the price of admission to a wrestling match at McLean's Theatre was advertised as "50 cents (ladies and children), 75 cents (balcony), \$1.00 (general admission), \$1.50 (ringside)."

Noregaard's performances were worth the cost. In the time he had been wrestling on the professional circuit, winning had become something of a habit. "Noregaard's skill as a wrestler is well known throughout the Coast states," the *Sun* noted, "having won something like 40 matches."

So many matches that in 1917 at the age of 28, Noregaard was referred to as "the undefeated light-heavyweight champion of Oregon." Less than a month after defeating Santel in November's handicap match—a bout in which a supposedly-superior wrestler must do more to win than does his opponent, such as pin or "throw" his man multiple times within a time limit—Noregaard defeated Ted Thye of Portland, "claimant of the professional middleweight wrestling championship of the world."

Before his wrestling days were over, "Terrible Ted" would win both middleweight and light-heavyweight world championships. But on this December night in La Grande, he met his match in Jim Noregaard.

"Ted Thye lost to Jim Noregaard at La Grande by being injured after taking the first fall from Noregaard in 30 minutes and 59 seconds of the fastest mat work ever seen in that city," the *Sun* reported in December 1917. "Jim took the second fall, and after

Handicap Wrestling Match
 Between
J. L. NOREGAARD of Wallowa
 and
CHAS. ARMON of Enterprise.
 Noregaard agrees to throw Armon 3 times in 45 minutes.
Morelock's Opera House, Sat. Oct. 30
 Ringside and first 4 rows 50c General admission 25c

HANDICAP
WRESTLING MATCH
McLean's Theatre
 Wallowa, Oregon
Monday eve., Nov. 19

AD SANTEL VS J. L. NOREGAARD

Ad Santel is the undisputed 175 pound wrestling champion of the world and he agrees to throw Noregaard four times in an hour.
 Don't fail to see this match. Good preliminaries before the main bout.

Two Round Boxing--A. B. HALL vs C. A. JAMES
 Wrestling--ALFRED NOREGAARD vs
 FRANK BALLARD

The ladies are especially invited to come and witness these athletic attractions.

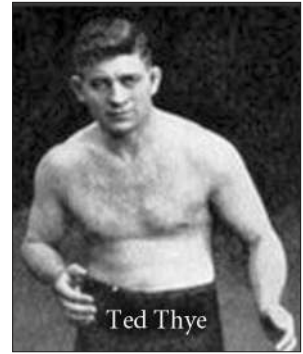
Admission: 50c, 75c, \$1.00; ring side \$1.50

five minutes rest, the men went at each other like tigers, and Thye was thrown into the ringside chair and received a double dislocation of his shoulder, rendering him unable to continue, and he forfeited the match.”

The following spring, Noregaard, like many young men of the time, found himself on his way to war—but that didn’t keep him from wrestling. “Jim Noregaard, the local wrestler now in the 20th Engineer Corps,” the *Sun* reported in May 1918, “wrestled in Washington, D. C. before the regiment sailed for France. Jim threw his man in three minutes.”

Once in France, Noregaard’s winning record continued. “His division boasted of several of the best middleweight mat artists of the United States,” the *Sun* stated, “who were greatly surprised when the light-haired stranger appearing from Oregon proved himself superior to them all.”

When Noregaard returned home at age 29, he returned to farming and resumed his wrestling career. In late 1919, for instance, he wrestled for “the middleweight championship of Oregon,” going against Gus Mycolow of Colorado. “This will be one of the best bouts ever witnessed in Wallowa, reported the *Sun*. ‘There is a \$500 purse put up by the wrestlers and fans for the winner.’ Noregaard won in two straight falls, “the first in 42 minutes and the second in 12 minutes.”



More About Jim Noregaard

Jim Noregaard was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, and came to America with his parents when he was 18 months old. Eventually, the family made its way in a covered wagon to Baker City, Oregon.

In approximately 1909, the family moved to a homestead in the Grossman country north of Wallowa, with Jim and his brothers walking “barefoot behind the wagon, herding cows.”

His start in wrestling came from his contact with Mike Howard, a national wrestling champion in Denmark who won four straight amateur world championships in America from 1908-1911, and who later became a Hall-of-Fame wrestling coach at the University of Iowa.

“He was the one who got my father started in wrestling,” says Ray Noregaard, Jim’s son. “He was married to my father’s sister, and they’d come to Wallowa often to visit family.”

One of Jim Noregaard’s advantages on the wrestling mat was his conditioning, which he achieved through intense training. “My father used to run 12 miles every morning on the railroad track,” says Ray Noregaard. “He ran six miles out and six miles back, and it’s not an easy thing to even walk on a railroad track.”

Another advantage was his toughness. Ray tells of the time his father was haying near Promise when he caught his hand in a hay hook while a horse was pulling the hay into the barn loft. Jim was pulled into the air, and as he struggled to free himself he tore off the first joint of three fingers of his left hand. “After he freed himself,” Ray recalls, “he rode a horse 20 miles to the doctor in Wallowa to get stitched up.”

Part 2 of “Wallowa’s Wrestler” will appear in the Spring 2020 issue of the *Wallowa Quarterly*.

* * *

Injured Shepherder

Injured Man Crawled to Camp

Wallowa, Oregon — With an arm, leg, and four ribs broken in a mountain snow slide, Lee Eusher, a shepherder, crawled half a mile to camp on his stomach. The trip took six hours and both of his hands were frozen when he reached safety.

– Newspaper report from Eu Claire, Wisconsin, June 15, 1933.

Wallowa Townsite

By The First Eastern Oregon District Agricultural Society

From *The Resources of Eastern Oregon* (1892)

A little more than two years ago, a townsite [for Wallowa] was laid out in the Lower Valley by the Island City Mercantile & Milling Company, and already a large trade has been built up at that point. The company has erected a large two-story store building, and carry a complete stock of general merchandise, farm implements, etc. Other lines of business are also represented, and the place will eventually develop into quite a village.

The land along the river is all claimed, and numerous settlers have well-improved farms. The hills also have furnished many homes to deserving settlers, but there yet remains considerable government land open to settlement.

North of the open country is a tract densely wooded in some places with a fine quality of pine, tamarack, and other timber. This region is certainly very valuable for its timber, and it is only a question of a few years and the advent of a railroad—one as sure to come as the other—when this large territory [Wallowa Valley], 40 miles wide and about 70 miles long, will contribute materially to our wealth.

Large glades or meadows are numerous in this section, from which quantities of good hay may be cut. Several ranches have been taken, but there is room for hundreds more. Water in plenty may be had from springs or wells. Game, deer, bear, and elk may be found in abundance. In short, we believe this region will for many years to come be a desirable place for home seekers.

The greatest need of Wallowa County is proper facilities for transportation. The building of the Elgin branch of the Union Pacific during the present summer places the farming lands of the Lower Valley within 25 miles of rail, but the larger portion of the county is still removed from 30 to 60 miles from the great “modern civilizer.”

The coming of a railroad hither would be a paying investment, both for the company and this country. It would ensure a cash market for all surplus farm productions; it would cause the settlement and improvement of our vacant lands; it would have a tendency to bring sufficient capital to the country to utilize our water powers, our vast timber belts, and other now latent resources; it would hasten the development of our mines; it would cause our marble and lime quarries to be worked, and its advent would not detract materially from any industry or occupation now existing here.

We fully believe that if the citizens of the county would take some action towards properly representing the country and its resources to outside capital, development would be very materially hastened, and the wealth of the country could be doubled in the next three years. This suggestion does not come from any visionary ideas, but from the example set by every enterprising locality of this growing Pacific Northwest.

* * *

City Pharmacy

Building Planned

E.A. Schiffler returned home to Pendleton Friday after arranging for the erection of a building [in downtown Wallowa] between the Hotel McCrae and the Stockgrowers & Farmers National Bank building. It will be one-story, reinforced-concrete with full basement, 30 by 70 feet. [This becomes City Pharmacy.] (*The Wallowa Sun*, June 17, 1910)

Pharmacy Repaired

The front of the City Pharmacy has just received a new coat of paint, the roof has been repaired, and E.A. Schiffler of Pendleton, owner of the building, advises Messrs. Allen and McKenzie, proprietors of the store, that as soon as the fall rains have tested the repairs to the roof, he will redecorate the interior. (*The Wallowa Sun*, August 15, 1929)

New Fountain

People who dropped into the City Pharmacy this week for a soda were pleased with the new fountain that has been installed. Although the seating capacity is no greater than the old one, the counter is lower and wider and more attractive. The counter with its half-circle mirrored back-bar is roomier and more modern, and there is more room for display of boxed candies. The job was finished Tuesday morning. Hilmer Johnson and Vern Mason are to be congratulated on this fine addition to their business establishment. (*The Wallowa Record*, March 24, 1949)

Ask the Wallowa History Center

What's the story behind the building that's now Food City?

The building boom struck Wallowa Monday morning. J.P. Morelock, the Overland county dealer, started work on his new garage, machine and repair shop on the corner of First and Storie streets... The building will be one of the best-equipped and most up-to-date garages in the Northwest. (The Wallowa Sun, September 29, 1916)

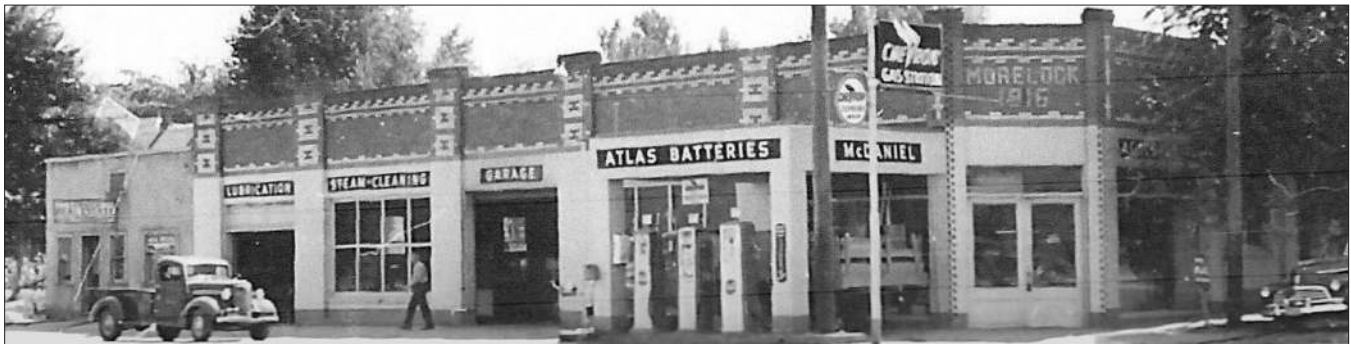
Through the years, the Morelock Building—built in 1916— changed hands several times, though it was always used as an auto dealership, a service station, or a garage until 1959, when it became a grocery store—the beloved Don's Food Store.



McDaniel Motor Co. Leaves Wallowa

From *The Wallowa Record* (October 2, 1958))

McDaniel Motor Company has sold and leased their garage building in Wallowa [the Morelock building] and will centralize their auto service and sales at McDaniel Chevrolet Company in Enterprise. L.E. McDaniel first began business in Wallowa in about 1930, when he operated a service station. In 1933, when Strite and Wade moved their Ford dealership to Enterprise, Mr. McDaniel leased the present garage building from the Wallowa bank. He purchased the building in 1934, and in 1945 added on the present concrete structure at the rear. In 1955 Mr. McDaniel purchased the Chevrolet agency in Enterprise. In making the decision, Mr. McDaniel said that he had no doubts about the future of business in Wallowa. But modern automobile business conditions, mainly the need for specialization, point toward a more efficient centralized location. The front part of the large garage building has been sold to Donald R. Conner, who eventually expects to move his grocery business there. The back part of the building has been leased to a truck and heavy-equipment maintenance service.



Don's Food Store

From *The Wallowa Record* (May 21, 1959)

Don's Food Store moved over the weekend to its new, larger quarters in the former McDaniel Motor Company building. A bright, fresh expanse of floor space filled with display islands, which are separated by wide aisles and ringed on four sides with a wide variety of refrigeration units, greeted customers when the store re-opened Wednesday morning. Remodeling of the garage space for the grocery store began about two-and-a-half months ago. Don Conner, proprietor, has been his own contractor for the job. Working at the job each day with him...has been Don's father, R.J. Conner. Mrs. Don Conner has worked steadily all spring, both at the counter and helping at the building. A great deal of help has come, too, from Joe and Phyllis Conner. Don Conner first entered the grocery business here in 1937 when he and C.L. Bales formed a partnership after Safeway closed its Wallowa store. Through the years, he has built his business and three years ago bought out his partner. The new store is one in which the entire community may take pride. It incorporates modern merchandising facilities and arrangements proved successful in the Northwest in recent years. The past year, Don has visited and studied new grocery installations in order to build up the plan which he has now put into effect at Wallowa. His many friends and customers here join in congratulating him on the splendid achievement which his new store demonstrates.

WALLOWA QUARTERLY

PUBLISHED FOUR TIMES PER YEAR
JANUARY • MARCH • JUNE • SEPTEMBER

Wallowa History Center

602 W 1st St • PO Box 481 • Wallowa, OR 97885 • 541-886-8000 • wallhistcenter@gmail.com • www.wallowahistory.org



Newletter Correction

In the Summer 2019 issue of the *Wallowa Quarterly*, the following note appears under the heading “Building Improvements,” taken from the July 19, 1928 issue of *The Wallowa Sun*:

As of today, June 2019, the post office half of the downtown brick building is occupied by Ron’s Place, the power company side by part of the Horseshoe Bar & Grill.

This note is incorrect. Right block, right brick, wrong building. (Darn editor!) The downtown brick building constructed in 1928 is today an east-side extension of the old Shell Mercantile building.

