

# WALLOWA QUARTERLY

Newsletter of the Wallowa History Center

*Preserving Our Past for the Future*

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## Wallowa's Flower Gardens of the 1930s

*During the dark days of the Great Depression, folks in Wallowa's part of the world did what they could to make things lighter and brighter—and the result was often a flower garden. Through the 1930s, these efforts, which affected both residences and businesses, began turning Wallowa into “the town of beautiful gardens.”*

### Backyard Gardens

From *The Wallowa Sun* (1931–1939)

*Note: The custom of the day was to identify a woman by her husband's name rather than her own, so some full names are missing.*

- **Mrs. Abbie Riggle** of Smith Mountain sent Mrs. Elmer a gorgeous bouquet of peonies last week from her beautiful flower garden. Mrs. Riggle is a great lover of flowers and takes great delight in beautifying her home with them both winter and summer. (June 18, 1931)
- Have you seen the [flower garden] owned by **William A. George** of Wallowa? This is one of the most beautiful flower gardens in Wallowa County and will be well worth your time and you will feel well repaid if you visit it. It took approximately two weeks to set out the 14 long rows of gladioli bulbs. The garden is now a mass of color with 300 varieties of gladioli blooming, which gives a very effective and attractive appearance to the home. Mr. George wishes for the people of this community and any others to know that they are welcome to visit his flower garden at any time they desire and also are welcome to a bouquet as long as his flowers are in bloom. ( August 13, 1931)
- **Mrs. Fleshman**, who lives on Alder Street, has one of the most beautiful flower gardens in this section of the county. Her place is now a mass of color, with the 1,500 gladioli, a large bed of dahlias, sweet peas, asters, and most any other kind of flower one can think of, in bloom. This garden shows the artistic ability of its owner; each flower seems to be in just the right place to show forth its splendor. A great deal of time was put in taking care of this immense garden. Mrs. Fleshman welcomes any who desire to come and visit this most alluring garden, and gives assurance that it will be well worth one's time to view these beautiful flowers. (August 27, 1931)
- **Mrs. D. McLean**, who had such an attractive flower garden this past season, is planning quite an improvement for her property on the highway. A double rock wall, two feet high, is being built, with the space between filled with very rich dirt in which will be planted vines, flowers, and bushes. The south wall will be given over to the rose bush section where a dozen new choice bushes will be planted. Herbert Larm is doing the work for Mrs. McLean. (November 5, 1931)
- **Mrs. Ottmar Frick** was hostess to the Billiken [Bridge] Club Saturday evening...At a late hour, delicious refreshments were served at small tables decorated with spring flowers. Gladioli were used in decorating the home. The guests were all very much interested in twin tulips grown in Mrs. Frick's flower garden. The two flowers were perfect specimens emanating from one stem with their individual stems bound. ( May 19, 1932)

• In the flower garden of **J.A. Roberts** near Wallowa can be seen some beautiful Hoosier red roses, some measuring six inches across. Whether this gives evidence of Mr. Robert's ability as a better farmer or that the soil on his farm is of higher quality we care not to hazard a guess. The fact remains, however, that here in the Wallowa Valley we are offered the opportunity of producing abundantly. Nature has endowed that gift upon us. (July 5, 1934)

• Spring time is peony time in Wallowa, and if anyone doubts that statement let them visit the beautiful peony garden of **Mr. and Mrs. George R. Evans**. With 36 plants embracing several different varieties, from the sweet-scented type to those with no fragrance, and a color palette ranging from pure white to deepest red, this garden is not only a panorama of color but one of aromatic fragrance that greets you like the perfume of a sweet-scented rose. On one white plant alone, Mrs. Evans said she counted 32 immense blossoms measuring from 9 inches across and 18 inches in circumference, to 11 inches by 20 inches. Mrs. Evans says she has never bought any of the plants, all being gifts and exchanges with relatives and friends. Mr. Evans is just as interested in this flower garden as his wife. (June 18, 1936)

• Pansies of a size, beauty, and fragrance that beggar description feature the flower garden of **Mrs. J.O. Kiddle**. Mrs. Kiddle presented *The Sun* with a bouquet Tuesday which attracts the attention of all who see it. (June 18, 1936)

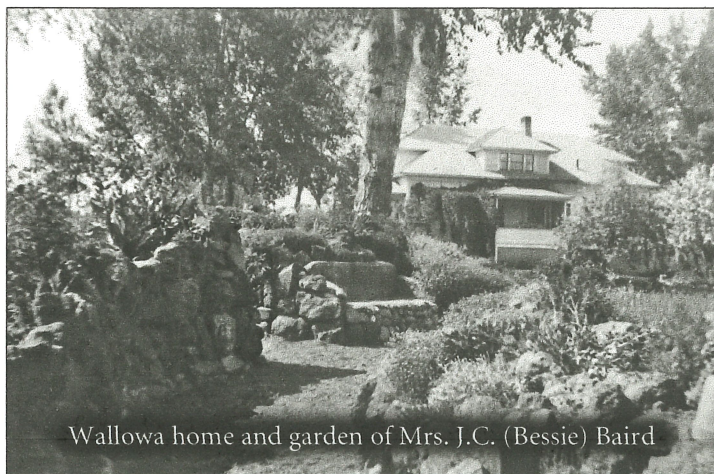
• A potted marigold with blossoms the size of the palm of a man's hand on a stalk standing 65 inches high, grown by **Mrs. Willis Milligan** in Wallowa, may be seen in a window of *The Sun*. The plant was taken from the flower garden of Mrs. Milligan and was one of many of like stature. It is the Claudette Colbert super-giant variety. There were three blossoms and eight buds on this one plant, the blossoms closely resembling a chrysanthemum in their fine texture. Mrs. Milligan also has cosmos in her garden that stand 75 inches tall with blossoms 3-1/2 inches across, and a collection of Walt Disney sweet peas that are eight feet tall. (September 15, 1938)

• With the valley for the last week blanketed each morning with the white down of hoary frost and the temperature below the freezing mark, Promiseland has continued virtually frost-free, and **Mrs. Boyd Carper** Saturday sent to *The Sun* office a beautiful bouquet of freshly-picked zinnias from her flower garden. For valley gardeners, the freakish, prankish weather this year has been particularly annoying. Not a single month has been free of frost. (October 12, 1939)

• Marvelous growth of geranium and fuchsia slips was made this summer in the flower garden of **Mrs. Jesse Skelton** in Wallowa. [Since June 15] the geranium has had three clusters of blossoms and a new bud, making four since being set out, while the fuchsia has 35 buds and blossoms to date with more coming each day. (September 14, 1939)

### Bessie Baird's Garden

From *The Wallowa Sun* (June 4, 1931)



Wallowa home and garden of Mrs. J.C. (Bessie) Baird

One of the most skilled pieces of workmanship of its kind in Wallowa County is the rock garden of Mrs. J.C. [Bessie] Baird. Upon entering the garden, one's attention is immediately attracted by a beautiful pansy and dahlia bed. Next is where the skilled workmanship begins, for there is a small fountain and fish pond made of rock and cement in the center of which rises the fountain, which is covered with moss, thus attaining a very effective and beautiful appearance. Passage through the garden is made possible by long, winding rock walks and steps elevating to higher portions of the garden.



In the east section is a large fish pond made three and one-half feet deep in order to prevent freezing and permitting the lilies and the gold fish to be left in the pond all winter. Cement bridges are placed back of the ponds for the accommodation of those who wish to sit and view the garden.

A rock fence, 184 feet in length when completed, will completely surround the garden, there being yet 65 feet of the fence to be built.

Beautiful sweet peas in a row 16 feet long, adorn the rock wall in the northeast section of the garden, while in the west section, placed in a very attractive way, are 200 different varieties of gladioli.

Approximately 10 truckloads of rock have already been placed in the garden, and by the time the wall is completed, many more rocks will be utilized. Mrs. Baird expected to have her garden, which has taken three years to build, completed by the middle of July or the first of August.

## Local Flower Shows

### Lostine Flower Show

From *The Wallowa Sun* (September 10, 1931)

Last Friday, Sept. 4, was a red-letter day in the history of Lostine. The first exclusive flower show ever held in this county was given under the auspices of the Community Club. Twenty-eight ladies entered flowers, and there were more than 350 beautiful bouquets brought for exhibition. [Entries were in the following categories: dahlias, zinnias, gladiolas, marigolds, calendula, nasturtium, sweet peas, snapdragons, hollyhocks, phlox, golden glow, marguerite, salpiglossis, asters, sunshine asters, petunias, cosmos, and larkspur.] The club hopes to make this an annual affair and hopes the other towns and communities of the county may also enter the contest.

### Wallowa Flower Show

From *The Wallowa Sun* (September 1, 1932)

Surpassing all expectations in beauty and variety of display as well as public interest, Wallowa's first annual flower show is now a thing of the past. Sponsored by the Wallowa Woman's Club, it was held Tuesday afternoon and evening at the Knights of Pythias hall. Several hundred people were in attendance, many visitors being present from Elgin, Enterprise, Lostine, and all parts of this county as well as other faraway points. Portland, Seattle, Tacoma, and Los Angeles were represented by visitors at the display.

The grounds surrounding the KP hall formed a splendid setting for the flower show within, as they have had a wealth of bloom all summer.

Entries were made under various classes, and competent judges made the decisions. Ribbon awards were given. Long tables were arranged in the hall, and the various exhibits of flowers were arranged thereon.

## Town of Beautiful Gardens

By Mrs. J.C. Baird

From *The Wallowa Sun* (September 1, 1932)

The flower show is over, and those who worked to put it on feel well repaid for their labor. Its success is entirely due to the splendid cooperation of the committees and the general public. The Woman's Club wishes to thank all those who have in any way helped to make the show a success.

We have only scratched the surface of this field of endeavor. Shall we let the sod of indifference obliterate the results of this first effort, or shall we move forward until Wallowa shall become known as the town of beautiful gardens?

The grounds of the KP [Knights of Pythias] hall and of the Cooperative Creamery should stimulate all other organizations to improve their grounds. The effort required is so small compared with the pleasure derived from such improvements.

It is now time to begin cleaning up the garden and thinking about next spring. All spring flowering bulbs should be planted in September or October. So get your shovel sharpened, grease the wheelbarrow, and make plans for a beautiful garden and a better and bigger flower show in 1933.

# World War I Letter: From the Front

By Harold E. Curtiss

From *The Wallowa Sun* (December 12, 1918)

*As a young boy, Harold Edward Curtiss moved from Ohio to Wallowa with his guardian-aunt in time to become a member of Wallowa's 1909 eighth-grade graduating class. Over the next decade, he married in Wallowa, joined the Wallowa Fire Department (Hose Company No. 1), moved to Roseburg, enlisted in the army, fought in France with both the 160th and 308th infantries, and earned a Purple Heart when he was "Wounded in Action [WIA], severely, in the Meuse-Argonne offensive." (Described by The Wallowa Sun as a "machine-gun bullet through the left side of his face, but he is getting along nicely and says, 'It will take some time for my hearing and temporary facial paralysis to become normal.')* He finally made his way home in the winter of 1919.

## At the Front, Somewhere in France

October, 23, 1918

**D**ear Mamma: Picture a night of intense blackness in a thick forest, our packs are unrolled in our pup tents for rain has been falling. We have had our evening meal. The order comes: "Roll packs and be ready to start as soon as possible." The order is obeyed and with our overcoats on we stood ready. Then comes the order "Unslung pack, take off overcoats," and we line up and start moving.



Harold E. Curtiss

The dark is so intense that one must hold on to the coat tail of the one in front in order to keep up. Soon we come out upon a road full of ruts and mud. We pass cook wagons after cook wagons, officers' autos and motorcycles galore and come to a crossroad out of which we turn to the left and continue in single file like ghosts ever going forward. We realize now that we are only a small part of what is going on for on both sides of us there are trucks and guns all going in the same direction.

Now we stop and receive more ammunition but it is only long enough to seize it and go on, ever toward the noise of battle ahead. Now and then a shell bursts near and we at first duck for some of us are going in for the first time; but as the way grows long we forget our fear in our weariness and, strange to say, that fear never returned to me.

On and on through mud and rain until at last we reach the first line trench and are hurried through a communication trench, always forward. The trench is narrow and hilly but we are soon out in the open behind a hill from the enemy and climbing a hill to another trench with dugouts where we spend the time until early morning when we again go forward to another line of trenches where the day is spent and the night also.

It was up to me to go over the top for my shift of guard (that night) against the enemy grenade throwers. That was my first facing of machine-gun fire, and the bullets seemed very close at first as they went singing past.

With the morning comes our advance across No Man's Land with fixed bayonets. No Man's Land in this case was covered with brush higher than a man's head and shell holes pocked here and there all through it. This day we see our first German prisoners and begin to realize the toll of the war. This night is spent in No Man's Land with every fellow for himself.

With the morning comes the advance and we stopped in a wood near a German camp which had been vacated. It was in this wood I got my first close shave.



No Man's Land, Flanders Field, France, 1919

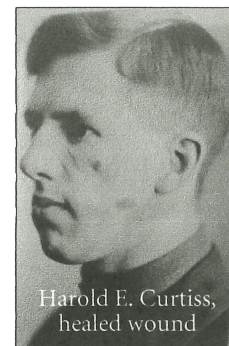


I was first man in the first squad in my platoon. The lieutenant was just ahead of me. A shell burst about 10 feet away and I was completely covered with dirt. There was not a man hurt although dirt covered several of us. The lieutenant says, "Are you hurt?" I said, "Well, I guess not," for I really wasn't sure I was alive.

There were several killed during the morning. About noon we again started forward in the face of machine-gun fire and shell fire. We advanced a kilo or so and again stopped. Here I was detailed to take back a wounded officer and my adventures were not altogether frolics but that is another story and will keep until a more favorable time, suffice it to say that I am still alive and I am very thankful. Peace will come in time and we will come home to the waiting loved ones none the poorer morally and with a much deeper interest in the home life.

Love to all.

Harold E. Curtiss, American Expeditionary Forces, France



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## Ask the Wallowa History Center

*Is it true someone tried to block the railroad from reaching Wallowa?*

*"Mr. McDonald posted...the right-of-way across his land, warning the railroad company not to trespass."*

*— The News Record, August 27, 1908*

### Hector McDonald vs. The Railroad

It's true—but only in part. Here's what we know: In 1906, Hector McDonald of Wallowa, whose land stretched from near the mouth of Wallowa Canyon across part of Lower Valley, sold 20 acres of his property as a right-of way to the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company (OR&N). For this he was paid \$600. Part of the agreement was that the tracks would be laid by September 1907. Almost a year past the deadline, however, the railroad had yet to reach McDonald's land. Instead, it was approaching the mouth of Wallowa Canyon, where it would begin its final push to Wallowa, crossing McDonald's property on the way. In the meantime, Hector McDonald had discovered an unsettling fact.

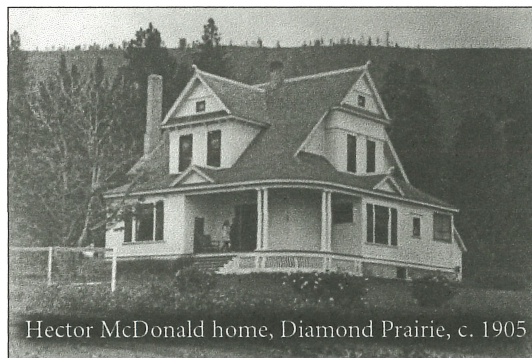
"Property owners further up the line [had] received additional pay above that which had originally been agreed upon," reported the September 18, 1908 issue of the *La Grande Chronicle*. "It was but natural for Mr. McDonald to want about the same price as others were receiving, especially in view of the fact that the time limit for the construction of the road had passed."

So Mr. McDonald posted his property, "forbidding the company to proceed on his land." In response, the railroad had a temporary restraining order issued against McDonald "to prevent interference with the progress of the construction." The battle continued.

"Mr. McDonald wants...damages that he believes he is entitled to for loss on hay bought last summer in the expectation the road would be finished so he could ship it out," reported the August 27, 1908 issue of *The News Record*. "The railroad company officials flatly refused to pay a cent."

For a time, the McDonald-OR&N feud "created no little excitement in Wallowa." But then, as the saying goes, cooler heads prevailed. After meeting with "a committee of prominent Wallowa citizens," it was decided that McDonald "would make no move to restrain the laying of the track." And that track reached Wallowa shortly after the agreement.

"This was the end of the matter," reported the September 18, 1908 issue of *The La Grande Chronicle*, "and it clearly shows that Mr. McDonald was not actuated by greediness. In fact, his disposal of the matter shows that he was willing to be as generous and public spirited as any of them."



Hector McDonald home, Diamond Prairie, c. 1905

# WALLOWA QUARTERLY

PUBLISHED FOUR TIMES PER YEAR

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## Animal Laws

### Dog Arrests

The ordinance providing for a tax on dogs in Wallowa has gone into effect in earnest this week, and several ownerless dogs have been made to feel its effect by forfeiting their lives. While the ordinance does not provide for the killing of dogs in case the tax is not paid, the marshal has been instructed by the council to kill all dogs that have no owners, and this is being done as fast as such dogs are found. The ordinance provides for the arrest and punishment by fine of any person owning a dog and refusing to pay the tax on it. Many people have already purchased a tax certificate and secured a tag for their dog to wear on its collar. Reasonable time will be give all people to pay, after which arrests will be made. — *The Wallowa Sun*, March 5, 1914

### Chickens at Large

Ordinance No. 8 prohibits the running at large of chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys in the city limits of Wallowa. The city marshal is ordered by the city council to enforce this ordinance. Owners of fowls take notice, as this ordinance will be enforced. People cannot raise gardens when chickens run at large. — *The Wallowa Sun*, April 4, 1918

### Dog Jail

The boys of the town will have an opportunity to earn a goodly amount of money by delivering to the city pound unlicensed dogs running at large. Two-bits a head will be paid for those not bearing a 1922 city license. Plans are being made to alter the pound department of the city bastille to accommodate the interned canines. — *The Wallowa Sun*, April 20, 1922

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The editor of the *Wallowa Quarterly* is Mark Highberger. All errors—factual, historical, technical, and grammatical—are his responsibility.

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**Wallowa History Center**

“Connecting people with the history of the  
Wallowas to foster vibrant rural communities for  
the future.”

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October 18, 2020

Dear Members, friends and supporters of the Wallowa History Center,

Fall has arrived here in Wallowa County. The cottonwood leaves have gone golden, and with that comes our final issue of *The Wallowa Quarterly* for the year 2020.

This issue covers a wide array of interesting topics: depression-era flower gardens, a letter home from a WWI soldier, city animal laws and a landowner dispute with the railroad. I deeply appreciate the breadth of historical offerings editor Mark Highberger brings to us all in each issue.

Reading, I was surprised to learn that both Wallowa and Lostine held flower shows during the heart of the depression; especially considering the difficulty of just “making a living” during those challenging years. It reminded of my own great-grandmother’s backyard flower garden and what an impression it made on me as a child seeing it in bloom. It was incongruous to approach a non-descript, ordinary little cottage with a postage stamp front-yard, only to be amazed to discover what lay hidden, and only hinted at, in the backyard- an explosion of color and smells. It must have taken years to complete.

As I mentioned in the my last note accompanying *The Wallowa Quarterly*, the history center has received a sizable grant to begin the work of a comprehensive site plan for the historic Bear-Sleds Ranger Station. At the moment, the board is reviewing proposals from three well-regarded architectural firms. We’ll select one, and begin work this fall. I’ll update you all as we work through this process.

In closing- thank you all for your continued support and encouragement.

Warm Regards,



David Weaver, Wallowa History Board President.