

SINCE 2001

SPRING 2021

ISSUE 40

WALLOWA QUARTERLY

Magazine of the Wallowa History Center

– Preserving Our Past for the Future –

IN THIS ISSUE

Story of the Wallowa
History Center

Touring the Wallowa
Country, 1882

Burrows Cafe

Wallowa's Fifth-Street
Highway

The Pilot, the Trappers
& the Ranger

AND MORE!

Special Issue

– 20th Anniversary of the Wallowa History Center –
2001–2021

FREE for WHC members • \$10 for non-members

WALLOWA QUARTERLY

PUBLISHED FOUR TIMES EACH YEAR: SPRING • SUMMER • FALL • WINTER

WHC MESSAGE BOARD

President's Message

And Then What Happened?

By David Weaver, WHC Board President

On the Fourth of July 1908, the body of a man was found lying face-down next to his wagon at the bottom of Valentine Hill. His foot was tangled in the long, leather reins of the wagon harness. An investigation showed that in his pocket was 87 cents and a card with the name "Adam Person, Anatone, Wash." on it. The wagon was loaded with cow and coyote hides, horse hair, sheep pelts, five Bibles, five sacks of old rubber overshoes, and an assortment of other small items.

The good folks of Lower Valley, supposing him to be a junk dealer rumored to have a cabin on the Grande Ronde River somewhere below Troy, buried him in an unmarked grave in Bramlet Cemetery. An inquest was empaneled to investigate Person's death. It was discovered that he had spent a week sick at the Red Fir Hotel just south of Flora. Evidently recovering a bit, he had traveled on to Wallowa and took lunch at the William Dougherty place in Lower Valley. He told the Dougherty family that he hadn't eaten for five days. Leaving there, he next stopped at W.H. Boyd's place and asked for a glass of water.

It was Nathan Bramlet who later found Person on the road. He watched Person's wagon make the pull up Valentine Hill and, upon reaching the top, turn around and head back down. It was there that Bramlet found Person lying next to the wheel of his wagon at the bottom of the hill. The two horses, still hitched, stood waiting patiently. But nobody seemed to know much beyond that.

I've always loved stories. Over time, the kinds of stories that attract me has changed—but not my love of a good tale. As a person passionate about the history of Wallowa County, I am often most affected by these wispy, half-told stories found scattered across old editions of our local newspapers—like that of Adam Person the junk dealer. They make me want to know more. But then I was the kind of kid who, after the bedtime story had finished, would ask, "And then what happened?"

This special edition of the *Wallowa Quarterly*, marking the 20th anniversary of the Wallowa History Center, brings us more of these fascinating stories, and it celebrates the persistence, passion, and work of those who have made it all possible. Over the last 20 years, under the original vision of Mary Ann McCrae Burrows and a small group of dedicated volunteers, the center has grown and expanded on its purpose to preserve, protect, and publish the images and writings that make up our local and regional history. And it's thanks to the support and encouragement of the many members and friends of the center that we continue on, working to more fully realize our core mission.

In the past few years we've moved into our new home at the historic Bear-Sleds Ranger's office, developed a website, completed an interpretive plan for a future exhibit space in the warehouse, and increased the number of newsletters we send to our members. This year we plan to complete the site survey of the compound to guide future restoration work, add to the content of the website, publish the fascinating story of early Wallowa pioneers Alexander and Jane Findley, and produce more copies of the new and improved *Wallowa Quarterly*. And if you're like me, you'll want to know what happens next!

* * *

Gene Hayes (1922–2020), who died late last summer at the age of 98, was a much-loved and respected friend of the Wallowa History Center. His skills as an artist, mapmaker, storyteller, and historian are greatly missed.

Our sincere gratitude to **Cindi and John Gaterud** for their thoughtful and generous donation to the *Wallowa Quarterly*.

WALLOWA QUARTERLY

SPRING 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- **WHC Message Board** 2
- **The Story of the Wallowa History Center** 4
It started with a vision and a photocopier—but it grew into something much, *much* more.
- **Wallowa Ranger Station** 6
A brief look at the historical beginnings of what is now WHC World Headquarters.
- **Touring the Wallowa Country, 1882** 7
In the summer of 1882, newspaperman D.H. Stearns set off to explore the Wallowa country.
- **Burrows Cafe** 9
This iconic Main Street business became a gathering-place and memory-maker for all Wallowa.
- **Home in Wallowa, 1906–1907** 10
With Wallowa reaching toward the “zenith of prosperity,” it was a good time to make a home here.
- **Ask the Wallowa History Center: Wallowa’s Fifth-Street Highway** 11
Starting in 1910 with a grocery store, Wallowa’s Fifth Street grew into a thriving business district.
- **The Pilot, the Trappers & the Ranger (Part 1 of 2)** 13
In 1929, an airmail pilot crashes his plane in the frozen, solitary world of the upper Minam River.
- **Then & Now: Homes of the Wallowa History Center** 16

The *Wallowa Quarterly* is a publication of the Wallowa History Center, Wallowa, Oregon. The editor of this issue of the *Wallowa Quarterly* is Mark Highberger. All errors within—factual, historical, technical, and grammatical—are his responsibility. We welcome not only ideas for articles, but also well-written manuscripts of approximately 500-1,000 words. Before submitting, contact the editor for guidelines and requirements at highberg@eoni.com. Unfortunately, payment to authors is limited to copies of the *Wallowa Quarterly* in which their articles appear.

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*Wallowa
History
Center*

Front cover: Early Wallowa homestead • Back cover: Homes of WHC, photos by Dawn Highberger, Wallowa

THE STORY OF THE

WALLOWA HISTORY CENTER

By Mark Highberger of the *Wallowa Quarterly* (and charter member, WHC)

“The Wallowa History Center works to save the memories, stories, and photographs that define the history and culture of the places we call home.”

– First motto of the Wallowa History Center, 2001

A big idea, a determined woman, and 20 years of dedicated labor—and the Wallowa History Center uncovers what is possibly the most comprehensive collection of memorabilia ever compiled by any town the size of Wallowa. Today the collection numbers in the thousands and continues to grow.

Getting Started

It all began with a strong passion, a shared vision, and a laser photocopier. The passion came from Mary Ann Burrows, who believed that that what her hometown of Wallowa needed was a memory of its past, a way of remembering the people, places, and events that have made it and shaped it through the years.

“It’s important to remember the ones who came before us,” she says, “because if we document the information of their lives, they are not forgotten and lost in time.”

The vision came from a Wallowa Public Library Board of Directors who knew that good ideas, unyielding enthusiasm, and clear photographs were rare and precious things, as well as indispensable necessities if the history of the community were to be preserved. And once the passion and the vision came together, the photocopier found its way through the door.

This photocopier, a marvel of 21st century engineering—it was, after all, the first year of that new century—proved to be something of a time machine as far as photographs were concerned. Slap down a faded, blurred snapshot from the early-20th century, lower the cover, push the button, and out came (slowly, oh so slowly) an eye-popping copy minus many of the fades and blurs. Magic.

Saving History

Magical or not, there was a problem: The local photo collection of moments captured in time, of images that gave glimpses into the past—of smiling families posing for the camera, of their homes and gardens, their neighborhoods and shops, their farms and fields—was seriously depleted. Time and neglect had taken their toll.

Through the decades, these images had been destroyed, discarded, ditched, and dumped; stuffed into boxes and barns and basements, shredded into nesting material for mice and birds, or just plain ignored. The prospects looked bleak. And then, once again, Mary Ann Burrows rode to the rescue. She began rummaging through barns, staking out city dumps, and sifting through boxes, trunks, and attics to save photographs and papers on their way to neglect or ruin.

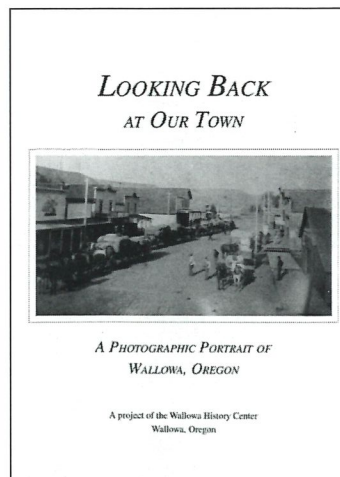
Along the way she became the primary curator, researcher, salvager, and protector of local history. In short, with her efforts came the beginning of the Wallowa History Center (WHC), whose mission became “Preserving Our Past for the Future.” (And whose Director became Mary Ann Burrows.) But because continuing this mission required money for expenses, it seemed only right for the town’s history, in the form of the historical photographs now being rescued, to help pay for itself. So WHC began to tread, ever so gently, into a book project.

Selling Books

In the spring of 2001, Bear Creek Press of Wallowa released “A Project of the Wallowa History Center,” a book titled *Looking Back at Our Town: A Photographic History of Wallowa, Oregon*.

“When some folks in Wallowa, Oregon, decided to do something about saving the memories of their town,” said the 2001 news release for the book, “the result was this collection of photographs, some of them more than 100 years old, that shows the way things used to be.”

When regional bookstores discovered it, sales for the month soon topped 200, and *Looking Back at Our Town* became the initial funding foundation for WHC.



At the release of Looking Back at Our Town, held at the Wallowa Senior Center on a sunny Saturday morning, crowds of people began lining up outside the building long before the opening, and eventually rushed through a door that had mistakenly been left open. In the first 20 minutes, the book sold 120 copies, or one every six seconds. And even though the cashier was late, book buyers waited patiently for someone to take their money, and every dollar for every book made it into the till.

Through the years, the center involved itself in at least a dozen more book projects, all of them using Mary Ann Burrows' uncovered historical materials as their sources, all of them providing money through either royalties or book sales (or both) to WHC.

Setting Goals

Later the same month, on April 30, 2001, the Wallowa History Center held its first board meeting.

Agenda items included "a summary of the organization's achievements and goals," as well as listings of the number of members (24 and growing rapidly), the membership costs (\$5 annually), the financial status (more than \$1,500 in the bank, with book sales responsible for all income), the recruitment of members by issuing 100 charter memberships, and the announcement of the center's new non-profit status under Friends of the Wallowa County Museum. (WHC would earn its own non-profit designation in 2003.)

It also included a set of goals. Among among these were "increase acquisitions of historical photographs and manuscripts, escalate the rate of publication of historical materials, and establish a research library accessible to the public." Achieving these goals meant finding even more of Wallowa's lost history.

Gathering Material

In the 20 years since then, Mary Ann Burrows has, almost single-handedly, done exactly that—uncovered even more history. Her tenacity in tracking down, digging up, and rescuing photographs, articles, memoirs, and other historical documents has resulted in what must be the most comprehensive collection of memorabilia ever compiled by any town the size of Wallowa.

Today the collection numbers in the thousands and continues to grow. In fact, it would be fair to say that without Mary Ann's work, there would be no Wallowa history as we know it today; it would still be buried in boxes, tossed into dumpsters—and lost to discovery.

Sharing History

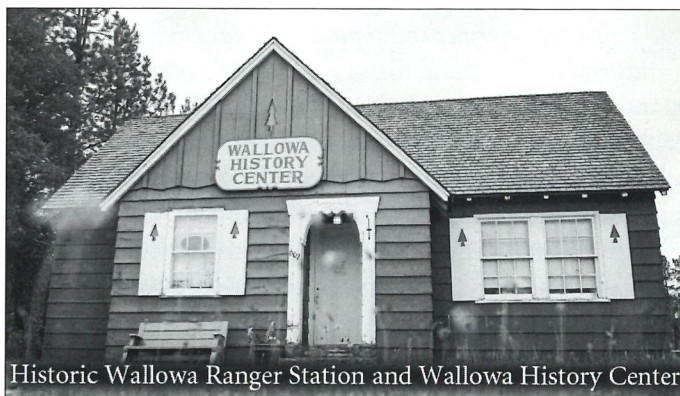
To accommodate its growth over the past two decades, the Wallowa History Center has expanded, starting in a small back room in the library and then moving to roomier Main Street storefronts. But from the beginning, the need for more space was always pressing. Among the items on the agenda's "Wish List" at the first board meeting back in 2001 was "Establish a home," one with enough room for "historical archives, research library, and rotating displays." Some 17 years later, that particular wish came true when the center found its way to the the gem that is the historic Wallowa Ranger Station.

"The Wallowa National Forest is contemplating the construction of a ranger station in Wallowa which will consist of an office, warehouse, residence, garage, barn, and corral..." The Wallowa Sun reported in September 1935. "The Forest Service...is asking the city to donate property suitable for the requirements."

The city made the donation, which is one reason that, once the station was abandoned, the property fell back into the city's hands, and from there eventually into those of the Wallowa History Center. The new headquarters has contributed significantly to helping the center accomplish one of its primary goals for the collection: making it all accessible to the public.

The means of achieving this access include an extensive library of photographs, manuscripts, and newspapers; a filing system of historical articles and related materials; a *priceless* online digital archive containing local and regional newspapers published from 1868 until 1943; and the *Wallowa Quarterly*, a newsletter published four times per year and distributed free to members.

The first of these newsletters was published in December 2003; the fortieth, which you now hold in your hands, in March 2021. The first newsletters each consisted of four pages published twice per year. Later editions stretched out to six and eight pages that came out four times annually.



Historic Wallowa Ranger Station and Wallowa History Center

Looking Ahead

Even with WHC moving into new quarters, even with the archives and library and displays on their way to completion—actually, these will never be finished, only built upon—nobody connected to the center shows the slightest sign of slowing down. After all, more goals are waiting to be set and met.

“We moved into our new home in July 2018,” reports WHC. “Our goal is to continue restoration and remodeling work on the historic buildings, increase our research library, and develop a visitor interpretive center.”

And so, unlike the title of its first book project, the Wallowa History Center is looking not *back* at our town, but *ahead* to its future.

“To Mary Ann Burrows, who had the dream in the first place, and then did the work to make it come true.” – From “Acknowledgments” in Looking Back at Our Town: A Photographic Portrait of Wallowa, Oregon (2001)

Wallowa Ranger Station

Ranger Station Residence

From *The Wallowa Sun* (December 31, 1936)

Weather permitting, excavation will start January 15 for the basement and foundation of a six-room residence for the Wallowa National Forest ranger station located in Wallowa. This will mark another phase in a development program of the Wallowa station.

The completed layout of buildings and grounds will be slightly and attractive, and Mr. Huff, Forest Supervisor, believes the Wallowa station, located as it will be on the main highway and being the gateway to the Wallowa County recreational centers, will be the information headquarters for two-thirds of the travel into the county.

Completion of the residence is anticipated for next summer. It is the third of a group of five buildings scheduled for early construction, with provision being made in the plans for future expansion. The group of buildings include the office and warehouse, which were built during the last

summer and fall, two residences, the six-room one already projected, and a three-room residence for the assistant ranger, and a garage.

The landscaping of the grounds will be quite elaborate, according to the plans. Of small shrubs, there will be a total of 519, while of trees there will be 131. More than half of the shrubs and trees will be native to Wallowa County. “When completed,” says Mr. Huff, “this corner of Wallowa, including the residences and their cut-leaf birches across the street, will be very attractive.”

Civilian Conservation Corps

From *Historic American Buildings Survey*
National Park Service (2009)

It is unlikely the [Wallowa Ranger Station] compound would have been built were it not for the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The availability of young laborers enabled the Forest Service to conduct numerous projects that otherwise would have had no manpower or funding.

CCC men were paid \$30 per month with \$22 being deducted and sent back home. This provided relief to their families, many of whom depended upon this as the sole source of income. In addition to the economic support to workers’ families, local economies in small Oregon towns were boosted by the purchase of local materials.

The Civilian Conservation Corps boys were moved around from year to year so that the same company might never work two seasons in the same place. This was true of the work done on the Wallowa National Forest.

“This Forest Service compound continues to represent the natural and cultural history of one of eastern Oregon’s most beautiful communities. The city of Wallowa intends to restore this important example of Pacific Northwest rustic architecture and tribute to bygone times. [It is] a significant part of the rich and diverse history and traditions that will be preserved and celebrated. [Wallowa] citizens and community leaders represent the pioneering spirit and vision that defines my state.”
– Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, *Congressional Record* (February 3, 2011)

TOURING THE WALLOWA COUNTRY, 1882

By Doran H. Stearns (1841–1904)

Adapted from “A Tour of Union County,” *Oregon Papers and Sketches in Union and Baker Counties*, published as a holiday supplement in the *Daily Evening Telegram*, Portland (1882)

In the summer of 1882, veteran newspaperman D.H. Stearns set off from Portland to explore eastern Oregon, including the Wallowa country. Although neither the county nor the town of Wallowa existed at the time, Stearns’ journey introduced him to the region, which he found to be “almost inaccessible to white man or Indian.”

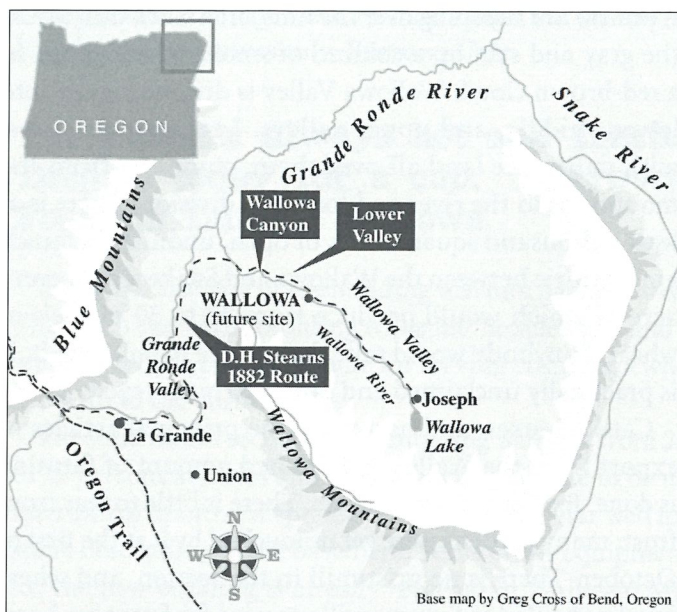
Wallowa Canyon

It is 20 miles from Summerville to Wallowa Bridge [at Minam], all the way over open country, now rapidly settling up. It is called Cricket Flat and Elk Flat, but I could not discover the “flat.”

As I rose the higher ridges toward the Wallowa, an immense reach of grassy swells and lightly wooded ridges could be seen away toward Snake River, where also no settlements have been made. There is evidently hundreds of thousands of acres of the finest agricultural land about the junction of the Grande Ronde, Wallowa, and Snake rivers, as yet unsurveyed.

About two and a half miles from Wallowa Bridge, a fine view of the deep and gloomy canyon is obtained. The ascent from Summerville has been so gradual and so pleasant that the yawning seam in the mountains, 2,000 feet deep, is a surprise. Wallowa Canyon is the terror of travelers, though its terrors disappear on approach. I go down into it by a comparatively easy grade and cross a log bridge over the clearest of mountain streams, now at its lowest and clearest, and running with a 10- or 12 -mile [per hour] current, 40 yards wide, and about an average of 15 inches deep.

A turn of the road past a small field of grain, and the business of going through the canyon begins. Densely wooded at the bottom, rocky and steep at the sides, there is just room for the road, the strip of sky, and the sliding river, which keeps an even pace and width for the whole 10 miles.

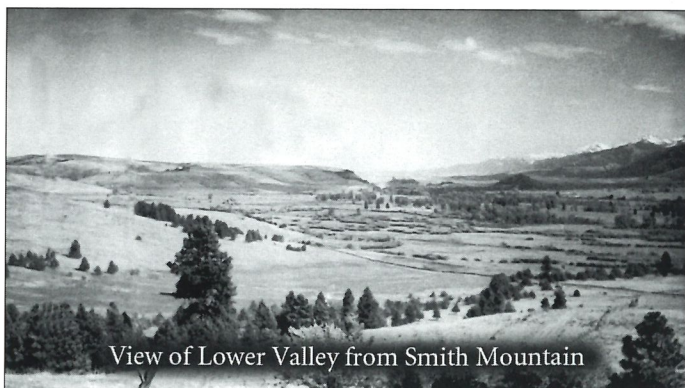


There are few large boulder in the stream, and no cataracts. A loaded wagon could be driven over its pebbly bottom the whole distance. A sharp eye upon the road is the rule, for passing places are not numerous. The shouts of the teamsters echoing through the canyon like steam whistles gave warning of their approach, and though several teams were met and passed, I had no serious difficulty.

Suddenly, while I was wondering if the end would never come, a half-dozen hogs ran across the road and into the brush, and in a moment more, the first house in Lower Wallowa Valley was in sight but 50 yards away.

Lower Valley

The mountainous sides of the canyon receded to the right and left. In half-bewildered delight at the sudden change, I halted to examine the details of the splendid landscape. Dome over dome, roofed in purple and gold, peak after peak, brown and gray spangled with white, spire above spire, snow tipped and shining, were marshaled in a towering line to the right. An oval valley filled the foreground with a meandering line of willows marking the river’s course with headlands and jutting promontories



View of Lower Valley from Smith Mountain



Doran H. Stearns

to mark the valley's outline, with mounds of rock and grassy knolls to diversify and break the level, quaint cottages of logs, brown and vine-trimmed, set in patches of richest green. A landscape the boldest artist would not dare. Low rolling hills covered with tall grass closed up to the skyline to the left. A few fleecy clouds hung about the gilded peaks.

A prairie fire sweeping over the hills left a black trail across the gray and sent up a column of smoke which ended in a red-brown cloud. Wallowa Valley is divided locally into lower, middle, and upper valleys. Low promontories, with cultivable land all over them, come out from the mountains to the river and form the division. There is at least a thousand square miles of open, undulating bunch grass prairie between the Wallowa and Snake rivers, every acre of which would produce from 30 to 50 bushels of wheat if anybody would take the trouble to cultivate it. It is practically unclaimed and only partly surveyed.

Cattle, horses, and bacon are the principal articles of export from the Wallowa. A limited amount of farming is done. Excellent crops mature. There is little to fear from frost; many gardens were yet untouched by it at the first of October. There is no grist mill in the section, and wheat must be hauled to Summerville or used for fattening hogs. Flour must be brought in from Grande Ronde or Walla Walla at great expense. There are probably 1,500 people who would instantly become patrons of a flouring mill on Wallowa River. It is a splendid chance for a miller with small means.

My visit to the Wallowa country was the occasion of another of the surprises of the summer...I had to enlarge and readjust my expectations. After six or seven years of study of its resources, I had just seen a corner of the state, not counted in before, which it is evident is capable, when capital and labor come to develop it, at producing more wheat annually than has ever been exported from Oregon and Washington combined in any one year.

The deep canyon of the Wallowa and Grande Ronde northward, the Snake River circling it to the east and south, leave a country complete of mountain valley and prairie 30 to 40 miles in width by 100 in length, almost inaccessible to white man or Indian. The only wonder is how white men ever gained a foothold in it.

Observations

The Wallowa section is the only place in the county where a large body of land open for settlement is uniformly good. In other places it is selectable, some good, some fair, and some indifferent.

Every man I met had the clear eyes and look of prosperity. Where all are prosperous, there is certainly room for more.

Socially, the people are like the citizens of any section of the union. Their only peculiarities are an unusual cordiality toward strangers and an intense love of their beautiful mountain valleys. They all seem to have appreciated the beautiful in nature, and an effort to make their homes and farms conform to the scenery of the country is visible at every step.

Cleanliness and neatness in the house is notable more than in any other section of Oregon. It may be that the women are healthier and stronger.

Especially in Wallowa Valley, where many of the people live in little square log houses, was the taste and art of women displayed in beautifying the rough interior and rougher exterior; needlework and flowers within, and trellis, flowers, and plants outside.

Profanity is heard, of course, in public places, and gambling is quite openly done, as in most new countries, but the great majority of the people are sober, industrious, and a goodly portion religious.

There is no portion of Oregon better calculated to produce fine cattle and fast horses, a class of stock which are always marketable at good prices. Her citizens are hospitable, energetic, and full of that sort of enterprise which always paves the way for wealth.

D.H. [Stearns] is a genial gentleman and a good judge of what constitutes a live newspaper, and spares neither time nor energy to make his publications not only readable, but highly entertaining and newsy, supplying a place in every household where they are read, unoccupied by other publications of a similar character...Mr. Stearns has overcome obstacles in the newspaper line on this coast that many, in fact most, would have shrank from, but he, with a firm faith and wholly undaunted by opposition and trails, has steadily gone forward with a light heart and an open hand, and has rose above all the influences that have operated against him, and today is proudly looking down from the eminence he has reached, and views with quiet satisfaction the broad field of usefulness that is opening out before him. As a live, energetic, farsighted businessman, he has few equals. — Weekly Corvallis Gazette (February 20, 1880)

Burrows Cafe

From *The Wallowa Record* (1952–1957)

“[The Burrows] had a reputation of serving excellent meals at their restaurant...Lee cut his own meat in the basement, and Myrtle baked all the pies for the cafe.” – *Wallowa County History: A Continuation* (2018)

While still in their early thirties, Lee and Myrtle Burrows began building at the corner of Main and Alder streets in Wallowa. “My goal was to own all four corners,” Lee Burrows once said, “but the Methodist church wouldn’t sell.” The other three corners, however, began to fill with the Burrows’ building projects. First came a Texaco gas station (1945), then their home (1950), and finally, in 1952, the business building whose iconic presence would shape the memories of the town for more than two decades—Burrows Fountain Lunch or, more commonly, Burrows Cafe.

Burrows Begins

Construction began last week week on a new business building in Wallowa to house a drive-in soft ice-cream store and sandwich, coffee, and pie lunchroom. Lee Burrows is the builder, and Mrs. Burrows will manage the business, which it is expected will open up in only a little more than 30 days. Location of the new building is directly north across Main Street from the Methodist church. It occupies the front yard of a residence known to many old timers as the old Davis house.

The building is to be 22 by 40 feet with full basement. It will be a low-type building, with only eight feet to the eaves, and a low hip roof which will extend about three feet out from the wall in the fashion of many southern California buildings. Locke and Pavelko, Enterprise, are the builders.

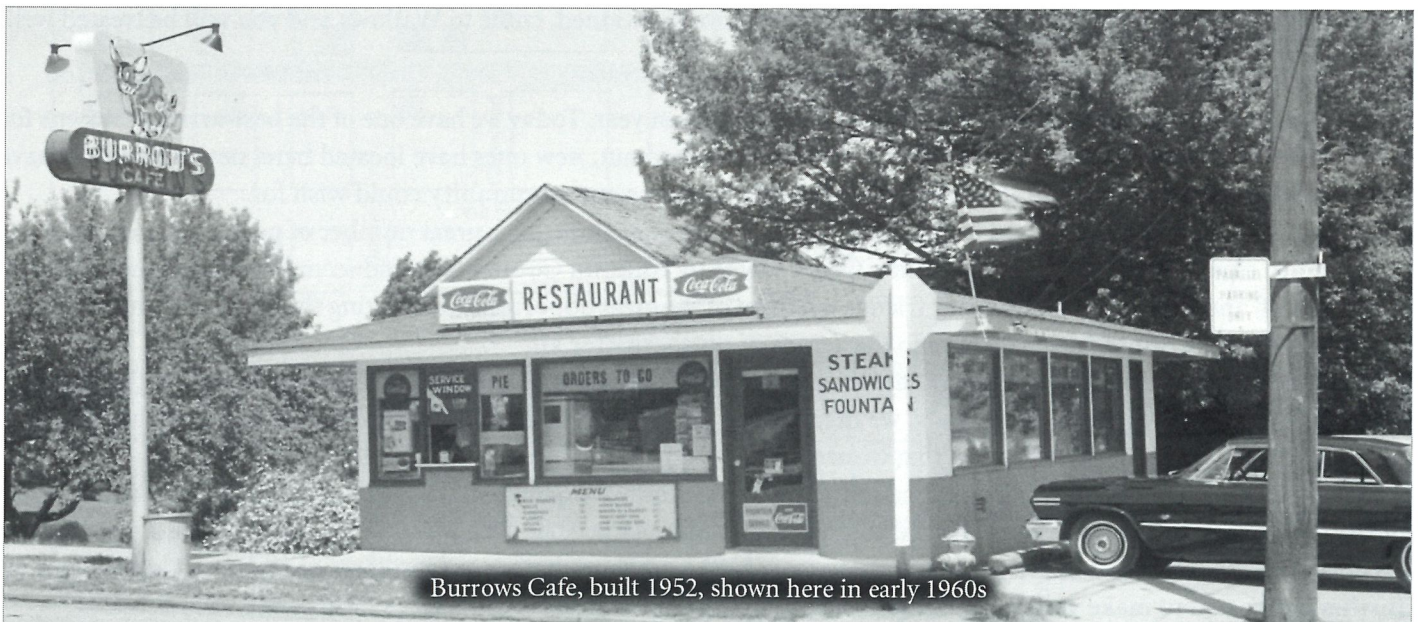
The sides of the building will be large glass windows, Mr. Burrows said. They are to be of the thermo-pane type, which do not steam up, and will face south and east.

**Our Coffee's always hot and fresh.
Drop in today for a cup. Burrows
Fountain Lunch, Wallowa.**

Along the east side of the building will be a parking area. The south end of the building will abut the sidewalk, and a window will be provided there for serving customers who drive up to the curb.

The lunchroom section of the building will seat from 20 to 25 persons at tables and at a counter. There are to be no interior partitions, except one protecting the cellar well for stairs descending to the basement. Some of the equipment for the new building is already received in Wallowa, Mr. Burrows said, and more will be in soon. The building is being built of lumber and is to be finished in stucco. A soda fountain is to be installed.

Mr. Burrows said that in every respect he is erecting the new building in such a manner as to permit its accommodating a growing business. For the present, he is



Burrows Cafe, built 1952, shown here in early 1960s

not razing the residence on the lots, but said that as the business at the corner grows he does plan eventually to take down the old house. He has in mind as the business grows and demonstrates its earning power, to expand it by the addition of several motel units. (April 10, 1952)

Cool Eating

The sun blazes down on the rest of us, but in Wallowa's three eating places, air conditioning takes care of the heat. The City Pharmacy and the Wallowa Cafe have had their cooling systems in operation for some time, and air conditioning was added to the new Burrows Fountain Lunch recently. It was about the same time that the Fountain Lunch got in their new chartreus plastic and steel chairs. (July 31, 1952)

Burrows Sign

Latest addition to Wallowa's "[Great] White Way" is the attractive sign Lee and Myrtle Burrows erected at their Fountain Lunch. It depicts a burro, which is cleverly tied in with the Burrows Fountain Lunch name. What seems commonplace and known to all of us here in Wallowa proves

FOR A QUICK
AND TASTY
LUNCH
SANDWICHES
PIE
ICE CREAM
Stop-In At
BURROWS
FOUNTAIN LUNCH

HAD YOUR
Cree-Mee-Freeez
Today?
Be Sure To Get It
At
BURROWS
FOUNTAIN LUNCH

quite refreshing and new to outsiders. Burrows' Fountain started just a year ago. We've come to take it for granted already here in Wallowa. But folks from Hermiston, Clarkston, Ontario, and Pilot Rock find the existence of this attractive Mellow-Freeze ice-cream-and-lunch brand new. Sunday, folks told the proprietors they'd never noticed the place before, though they'd traveled through Wallowa a half-dozen times. All of which leads around to our point: If you don't tell the world about your business, it's quite certain no one else is going to bother to do so. Congratulations, Lee and Myrtle, on helping to put Wallowa on the maps of a lot of added people in eastern Oregon. (June 25, 1953)

Paved Parking

H. W. and H. J. Miller installed a paved "apron" in the parking space of Burrows Fountain Lunch. It's a workmanlike, smooth, and attractive job and will be a real asset for patrons of the cafe, especially in wet and sloppy weather. The entire area from the building east to the new pavement on Alder Street was paved. (August 1, 1957)

After 21 years of operating Burrows Cafe, Lee and Myrtle Burrows sold the business in 1973 and retired.

* * *

Home in Wallowa, 1906–1907

From *The Wallowa News*

Wallowa is now able to meet the demands of all. There are four general merchandise stores, a grocery, a furniture, a hardware, and three confectionary stores. Each one is well-stocked to supply the needs of all. Their prices are reasonable. When you want something along the lines above mentioned, come to Wallowa and you will be treated well. (November 30, 1906)

What a great change has come over the Gate City in the past year. Today we have one of the best-arranged towns for its size in eastern Oregon. Our merchants have branched out, new ones have located here, new enterprises have been successfully launched, and Wallowa has as bright a future as any community could wish for.

Plenty of timber, water, and good land within reach of everyone, and what a great number of people are looking for is to be had in close proximity to the Gate City. Other towns in Wallowa County have inducements that should be taken advantage of, and when you write to your friends tell them of the great opportunities awaiting the grasp of commonwealth to carry Wallowa County with its towns to the zenith of prosperity for all.

Where is there a county in the Beaver State that can show a greater percentage of thrift than is shown by the Wallowa citizens. In speaking to Wallowa citizens, we mean every citizen in the county. Because the county and the Gate City have the same name, many people feel that we are speaking entirely for the town of Wallowa.

The greater part of the above is true of the county, but the point we desire to make is the zeal with which the taxpayers of this county have met their taxes for the past year. Out of a tax levy of over \$80,000, all was paid into the treasury except about \$2,000. What county can beat that record? We are proud that we are residents of Wallowa County, and we further desire you to make your home in Wallowa. (January 11, 1907)

Ask the Wallowa History Center

WALLOWA'S FIFTH-STREET HIGHWAY

Did there used to be businesses along Fifth Street?

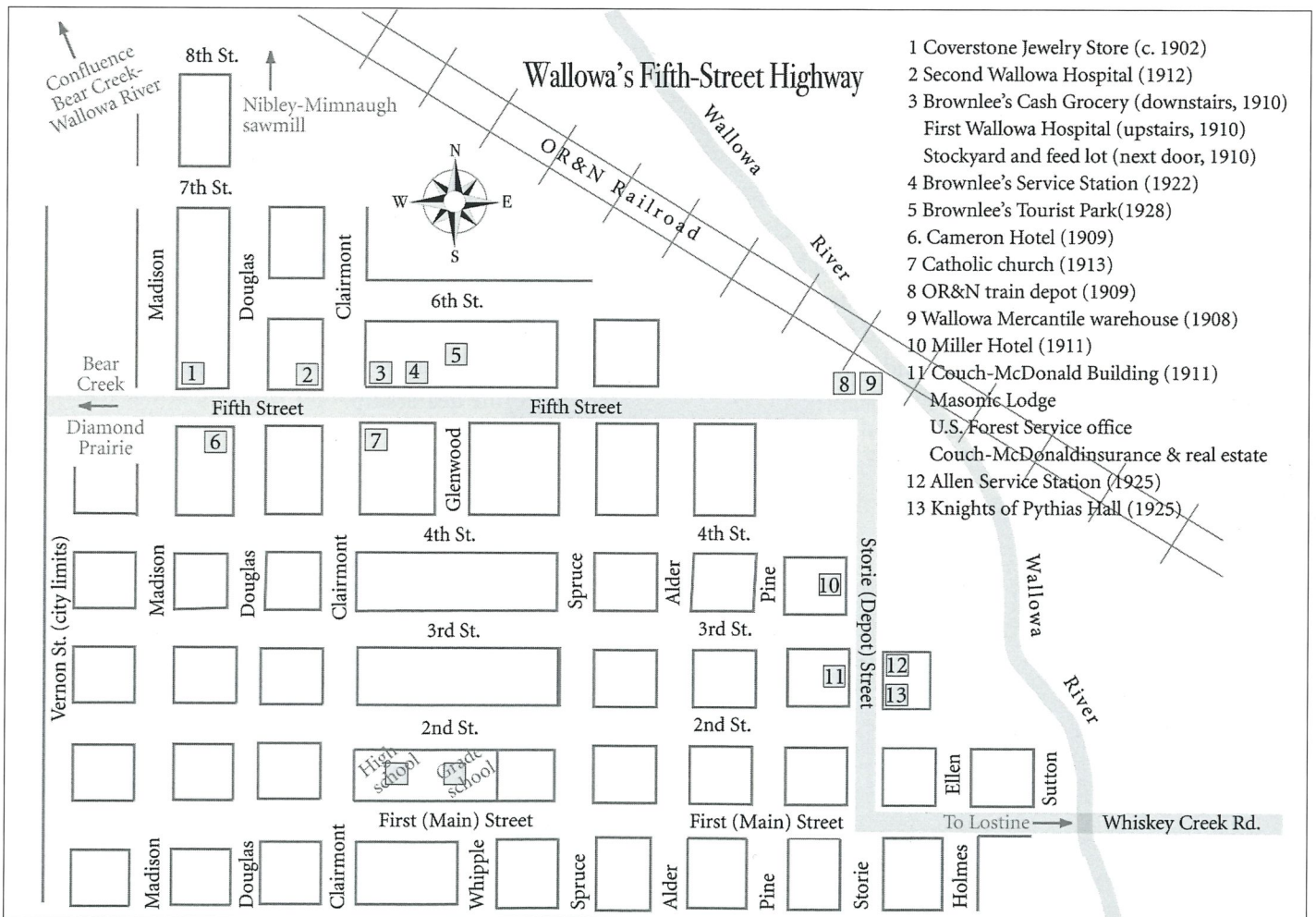
Although Wallowa's Fifth Street area today is mostly residential, it was once, starting in about 1910 with a grocery store, second in size and importance only to downtown's Main Street as a business district. Two factors were primarily responsible for this growth: the valley's traditional roadways, and the business investments of F.H. Brownlee.

Traditional Roads

"The new \$11,000...Knights of Pythias [Hall] in Wallowa is located on the highway [Storie Street], where it will catch the eyes of all passersby." – The Wallowa Sun (December 11, 1925)

Oregon's state highway system began in 1917 with the designation of 36 "primary highways" across the state. Among these was Wallowa Lake Highway No. 10, which would eventually become the primary link between the Grande Ronde and Wallowa valleys—but that wouldn't happen until the 1920s and 1930s. Until then, the main road between Elgin and Wallowa still followed some of the original routes established by early settlers.

This meant that after emerging from the Wallowa Canyon and entering the Wallowa Valley, the road crossed Lower Valley and Diamond Prairie—along with the Wallowa River and Bear Creek—before entering the northwestern part of town near the corner of Fifth and Madison streets. From here it continued east to Storie Street (the corner of Fifth and Storie was the site of the train depot) before turning south for its intersection with First (Main) Street near the business center of town. This made the Fifth Street-Storie Street route the main "highway" through town, a distinction it would keep until the rerouting of Wallowa Lake Highway No. 10—today's Oregon Route 82—in 1934.





Brownlee's Cash Store, est. 1910, corner of Fifth and Clairmont, Wallowa

F.H. Brownlee

"In 1910, F.H. Brownlee had sold his claim on Smith Mountain to the George Palmer Lumber Co. of La Grande, land and timber. He went to Wallowa and put up a store and stockyard on the outside of town." – Don Riggle, *35 Years on Smith Mountain* (1983)

F.H. Brownlee appears to have been an astute, versatile businessman with a sense of civic responsibility. Through the years he sold real estate, started businesses, raised pigs, and served as a Wallowa city councilman as well as its justice of the peace.

In 1910, after selling his Smith Mountain property—the going rate at the time for timbered land was 10 dollars per acre—F.H. Brownlee began investing in real estate along Fifth and Clairmont streets. It was a wise investment. The previous two years had seen some of the most profound changes in the short history of the small town: The train had arrived, the Nibley-Mimnaugh sawmill had opened, a boarding house had been built for mill workers, and several additions, including the Clairmont Addition, had been annexed into the city, expanding the city limits significantly.

Seeing his opportunity, Brownlee opened a real estate and insurance office downtown, and soon he was opening and developing businesses along Fifth Street. Through the years these included a grocery—and later a general—store, a stockyard, a feedlot, a service station (the first in Wallowa) and a tourist park. His neighbors included a jewelry store, a hotel, a doctor's office, a hospital (the first in the county), a train station, a warehouse, and even a Catholic church—all on Fifth Street.

Meanwhile, along Storie Street—or Depot Street, as many were calling it—other investors were establishing their own businesses and buildings. Once past the train depot and the adjacent Wallowa Mercantile warehouse, there came the Miller Hotel, the Allen Garage (the second service station in Wallowa), the Knights of Pythias Hall and, all in one building erected in 1911, the Masonic Lodge, a real estate and insurance office, and the U.S. Forest Service office. Other businesses along the same route through the years included a millinery, a tea room, a boarding house, and an automobile dealership.



Cameron Hotel, est. 1909, corner Fifth and Douglas, Wallowa



Miller Hotel, est. 1911, Storie Street, Wallowa

THE PILOT, THE TRAPPERS & THE RANGER

The dead of winter, a plane crash, and an injured pilot collide in the dark, frozen world of the upper Minam River.

Part 1 of 2

The Pilot: Harold E. Buckner

Adapted from “Valiant Airline Pilot Flies for Varney Airlines”

By Nancy Allison Wright, President, Air Mail Pioneers (1999)

Pilot Harold Buckner couldn't have been happier; flight training in the army had paid off. He'd been accepted to fly the mail for Walter T. Varney's new airline, Varney Airlines. The 435-mile route would be between Elko, Nevada, and Pasco, Washington, with a stop in Boise, Idaho.

Some called Contract Airmail Route 5 (CAM-5), the least promising of the U.S. Air Mail Service's new contract lines, said it was a “nowhere route” over a bunch of “cow towns.” But Harold considered the new route, launched on April 6, 1926, far from shoddy; besides, he liked Varney, a flier himself and owner of a flying school and an air taxi service.

No one in Harold's family could convince the young pilot to choose another profession, to avoid what he considered the promising new field of aviation, even though the chosen route included a dangerous succession of mountains, high desert landscape, deep canyons and sparsely-settled terrain.

All went well at first. Harold took pleasure being recognized at flight stops as the Varney pilot. People in town called him by his first name. “Harold's arrived,” they'd shout when the whirl of his Swallow biplane sounded overhead. His wife Anna enjoyed status as wife of the valiant Varney air mail pilot.

Flying the route in winter, however, was daunting even for a veteran pilot. In January 1927, Varney pilot George Buck flew through sleet and ice so thick he unbuttoned his safety belt to see over the ice-clogged windshield.

Harold understood the dangers of winter flying; but he prided himself on coming through, delivering the mail no matter what the conditions. Thanks to Harold and fellow pilots, revenues were up and climbing. In 1927 Varney replaced his Swallow biplanes with the more reliable Stearmans. It was a Stearman Harold was flying [Thursday, January 17], 1929 when he left Pasco for Boise.

The weather was terrible—snow, fog, ice, much the same condition Buck had encountered and survived two years before. At 4:10 p.m. the manager of the La Grande, Oregon, airport heard Harold's plane pass over. Two hours later, Boise reported he had not arrived. Calls immediately went out along the line.

A plane had been heard over [Horse Ranch] in the Minam, Oregon, area 20 miles east of Cove. Harold was far off course and possibly lost.

Varney officials from Boise immediately headed to La Grande, arriving late that night. The next morning, just as they were formulating plans for an extensive search of the Minam area, a telephone call came through from the forest ranger at Cove. The plane had crashed; the pilot was safe and injured. He had passed over the ranger station at 5:20, and 10 minutes later

dived into a tree about a mile from a cabin occupied by two trappers. A rescue party from La Grande, a few on horseback, set right out.



Harold E. Buckner

When the U.S. Air Mail Service was established in 1918, only U.S. government or military personnel flew its planes. But with the passage in 1925 of the Air Mail Act, a law “to encourage commercial aviation and to authorize the Postmaster General to contract Air Mail Service,” the doors were thrown open to competitive bidding among private companies. As a result, starting in 1927 all air mail was flown by commercial carriers who had won bids for Contract Air Mail (CAM) routes, most of which connected to the government's Transcontinental Air Mail route between New York and San Francisco. One of these, CAM-5 between Pasco and Elko, was operated by Varney Airlines, established by Walter T. Varney in 1926 (the predecessor to today's United Airlines). This was the route flown by 32-year-old Harold Buckner in 1929.

The Trappers: Bill Brockham and Jack Hamby

The Pilot's Crash

By Jon M. and Donna McDaniel Skovlin

From *Into the Minam* (2011)

Buckner had been caught in bad weather Thursday afternoon [January 17]. According to [the] manager of the La Grande airport, his plane was heard at 5:30 p.m. passing over the Horse Ranch, which was shrouded by fog. Perhaps the pilot saw an opening in the fog and nosed down, hoping to get his bearings, and before he could straighten out, his plane crashed head-on into the trees. By an incredible circumstance, two trappers were staying in the Minam Ranger Station cabin not far distant [from the crash site]. The trappers, [Bill] Brockham and Jack Hamby, heard the plane crash and immediately began searching for it. They had yelled and occasionally fired their rifles, but had heard no response. They were about to give up and return to the cabin when Hamby called one more time, and this time there was a faint answering cry. They followed the sound into a thicket and located the plane with Buckner in the cockpit.

The Trappers' Search

Adapted from "Account of the Rescue and Death of Harold Elwin Buckner"

By William L. Brockham

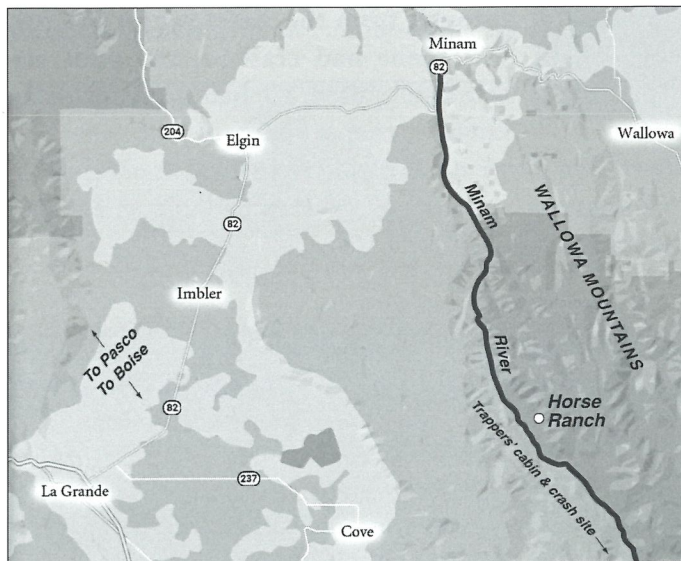
The Plane

On the night of January 17, 1929, at approximately 5:05 [p.m.], my [trapping] partner [Jack Hamby] reached for his rifle, and at the same instant I heard an approaching sound which, through the canyon walls and storm, seemed strange indeed.

Upon rushing to the door, I discovered it was a plane. I rushed outside. The snow was falling heavily, so heavily that it would have been impossible to tell just how high the plane was. Looking intently that I might get a glimpse, for I was well able to follow the sound, I imagined that I caught a faint glimpse of light. The plane promptly changed course almost directly above our cabin.



Harold Buckner in his airmail plane



Jack came to the door and listened. The plane at this time seemed to be traveling under a burden—spluttering and missing at intervals. I said to Jack that the poor fellow was lost and could not possibly get out of the mountains in that terrible storm with only 800 or 900 feet of elevation.

I walked to the other corner of the cabin that I might hear the last vibrations of the plane. Upon approaching the other side of the canyon, the plane sent up the most hideous cry imaginable. I stood in awe, wondering how it was possible that the pilot was ascending the height. The shrill cry continued to remain behind, though the plane bore diligently on, on.

I gathered that the pilot was going to land in a big open burn. I called to Jack to come and hear the noise, but when I did get him outside, the sound had silenced, and all was lost in the distance.

In a couple of moments I entered the cabin. I told Jack that the poor fellow would never get out of the mountains in this storm, which was indeed falling fast, and on the high mountains could be heard strong winds gathering. We talked of landing possibilities, of the La Grande Landing Field, and agreed that that must have been his destination, and under the circumstances that it must have been a mail plane. Twelve minutes possibly had elapsed when the plane again was heard.

Rushing outside that I might again follow the course of the plane, I called that he was just above the river and coming straight down its course. Jack came to the outside, and just at that instant, before the final crash, we both caught the imaginative sound of a tree crash. I said, "My God, the poor fellow is down, Jack. We must get after him at once."

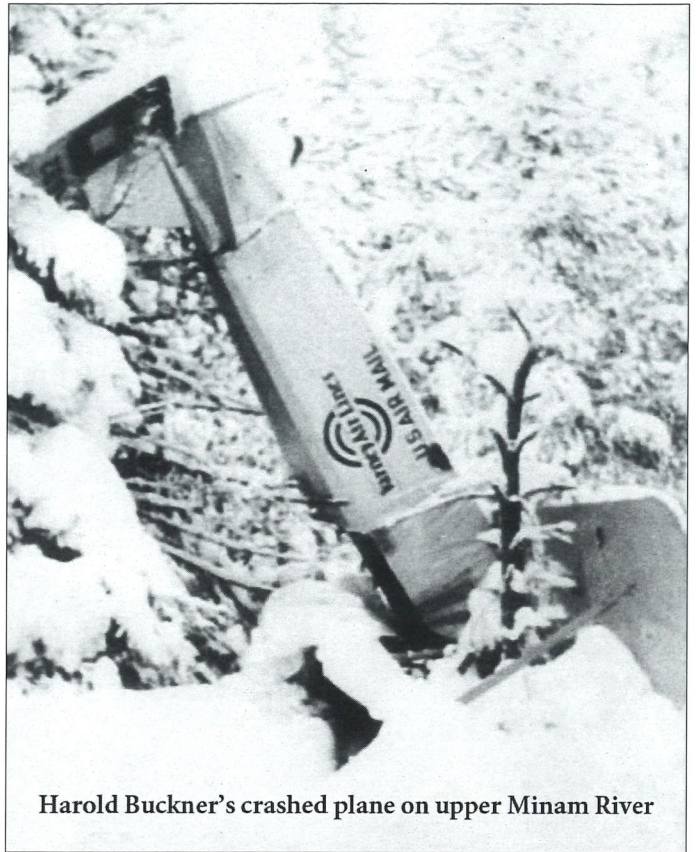
The Search

As I started to speak, the second crash came, but we knew he was down, so all that remained was finding him. There was much discussion in regard to the plane's exact location. However, two minutes later we were snow-shod and bundled and on our way.

I took my rifle to signal. We each had lights. We walked nearly a mile, but still I thought we were going directly to the plane. All of a sudden Jack hollered and I silenced him with the long suspense of listening. He asked me what I thought I heard. I told him the fellow was right down in the edge of the burn, but he was hurt.

We went on, sidetracked, circled, crisscrossed, looked and discussed and finally turned our attention along the river. At this point, the search seemed at an end, with the rugged, rolling, heavily-timbered wilderness at the base of the mountain on either side. I still persisted. I shot. We went back toward the cabin. Finally, we came to the edge of the burn again, and again the search seemed at an end. There was an opening down to the river. Jack mentioned it.

The life of a trapper on the Minam was simple. One needed only to have some traps, the outdoor skills of a woodsman, and a strong enough constitution to bear up under cold, strenuous isolation. — Jon M. and Donna McDaniel Skovlin, Into the Minam (2011)



Harold Buckner's crashed plane on upper Minam River

It was our last hope. He had been through it before, so I had him lead the way. We looked all up and down the river. Surely I couldn't be mistaken in the location of the plane. Jack started for the trail, relating that we would have a big search tomorrow in an awful jungle, and that we would be up early in the morning.

My decision to give up the search then led to a compromise—we would vary two routes along the river and to the apex in the trail half a mile away. We turned that way and started.

Ten steps and there the plane loomed up before us, our lights showing on the underneath side of the wings. We stopped in amazement.

In the accounts of the 1929 plane crash on the upper Minam, some details about dates, times, and distances are missing, vague, or conflicting. Although these create some discrepancies, they do not diminish the human tragedy—or the heroism—at the heart of the story.

Part 2 of "The Pilot, the Trappers & the Ranger" will appear in the Summer 2021 issue of the *Wallowa Quarterly*.

Wallowa Then & Now

HOMES OF THE WALLOWA HISTORY CENTER

Over the past 20 years, the Wallowa History Center has found a home in four different places.

The first home of WHC, and a humble one at that, was the back room of the Wallowa Public Library, which had formerly been a meat market, a TV repair shop, and a cafe, among other things, before owner Georgia Wilson »» donated it to the city as a library. The room had just enough space for a table, a photocopier, and a row of shelving that held a collection of *Wallowa Sun* newspapers. And that was about all. Most of the work done by WHC members was done at home.



The second home required a short move across Main Street to a former barbershop turned into a small office. It was attached to the east side of Shell Mercantile—on the other side of its back wall was a liquor store—and it had enough space for a computer or two as well as for the center's increasing collections. It also had a front window large enough to hold a rotating display of historical photographs. One significant addition at this site was the first WHS sign, painted by Wallowa's own Gene Hayes. ««

When the filing cabinets of photos and papers outgrew the office space at Shell's, WHC was ready for another move, once more across the street, but this time to the building just east of the library. This office had been »» constructed in the early 1970s as the Wallowa branch of Winding Waters Clinic, and then had mostly sat empty since the clinic closed. Though far from historical—and even further from attractive—the building was functional, and its Main Street location convenient.



The fourth location of the Wallowa History Center was the one worth waiting for—a permanent home at a historic site, one with enough space to establish a research «« library accessible to the public, to create a system of rotating displays, and to build and catalog an archive of historical materials. This came courtesy of the boys of the Civilian Conservation Corps who, beginning in 1936, built the Wallowa Ranger Station, which became destined to provide the final home for the Wallowa History Center.

WQ is provided free, four times each year, to members of the Wallowa History Center.