

# RECALLS FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION HERE IN 1884

## E. L. Eckly, Pioneer Newspaper Man, Remembers First Train

"It was a gala event in the Old Town of La Grande the day in mid-June," said E. L. Eckly, pioneer newspaper man and publisher of La Grande, in telling the story of the arrival of the first railroad train in La Grande, "when a steam locomotive rounded the curve at Oro Dell and laboriously pushed ahead a dozen or so flat cars laden with ties, rails, spikes and fishplates for a railroad into the Grande Ronde valley. There was no formal celebration for the arrival of the rails, and there could not have been any, by reason of the fact that heavy rains for a couple of weeks or more had enforced a suspension of track-laying just west of the place known as Stump Town and afterwards as Perry. But the skies cleared, the track came on, and on the Fourth of July, 1884, we had a big celebration in honor of the arrival of the first passenger train into La Grande. The train could hardly be called a passenger train either, it was a mixed train a passenger coach or two, the rest of the cars being freights or flats.

"After the lapse of half a century," Eckly narrated, "there are still quite a number of events, which took place on that memorable day, that stand out in my recollection.

"What was the style of dress? Well, a lot different from what is now worn by both men and women. The generation of today would probably describe the styles of that day as being 'unique.' At that particular celebration, I was dressed as most of the young men of the times, my attire including a hard-boiled hat, a seersucker coat and Buckingham and Hecht boots. Oh yes, and I wore whiskers.

"Of course, there was a grand parade. The town band, of which I was a member led the parade and furnished music for the day's activities. Other members of that organization were J. W. Gray, leader, and D. S. Kinsey, both playing tenor cornets; Ed Beldeman and Frank Palmer, alto; Will Kinsey, bass drum; Bog Sheets, tuba and I played a tenor key trombone.

"I was editing the Union County Record, a weekly newspaper, in La Grande, at that time. As was customary, I had my business represented in the parade. John E. Jeffery, who was my printer, tended a foot-power job press which was mounted on a heavy 'dead X' wagon. He printed handbills and threw them out among the spectators as he passed along.

"Sometime about noon, the pa-

rade marched to the arbor which had been built on the hill near where the courthouse now stands. There was a program. Gen. J. H. Stevens read the Declaration of Independence. Gen. George B. Currey, father of George Currey, was orator of the day. Just as he had progressed in his speech about as far as the Bunker Hill monument, the train whistled and away went the crowd for the train. The oration was cut off right at the 'monument'—that was the last of it—it was never finished.

"The crowd went down to the tracks," continued the narrator. "The dominant idea of all of them was to have a ride on the railroad and when the flat cars were unloaded, the people piled on and with dangling legs rode to Oro Dell and then walked home.

"The conversation on that regal excursion took various turns. Some spoke of the railroad as a potential monopoly but all agreed that it was a great thing. A few pessimists expressed regret for the future of the freight hauling industry as the business of transporting goods by team from 'the landing,' Umatilla, was a source of revenue for many. One of them hitched his teams to plows and harvested and eventually acquired 14,000 acres of cheap wheat land near Cove and years later was known as the 'wheat king.' He was A. B. Conley. He figured that he could produce wheat with horse power at an average of 23 cents per bushel.

"While very many of the railroad greeters of 50 years ago had never before seen a railroad, there was one prominent exception. They were Robert and Hannah Palmer, parents of Mrs. Lydia Grandy and Mrs. Emma Harding, of La Grande, and of Charles Palmer, of Baker. These two people had been on the first excursion run by the Baltimore and Ohio on a stretch of 16 miles built out of Philadelphia and this was the first railroad excursion ever run in the United States. It is all verified by records kept under glass in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C., and these records were inspected by a granddaughter, Mrs. Sherwood Williams a few years ago.

"I do not know what sort of impression or reaction may have been experienced over the arrival of the railroad after many delays and disappointments," concluded Eckly in his reminiscence.

### HAS FAST HORSES

D. A. McAllister is the proprietor of a fine horse breeding establishment three miles east of La Grande. Many of the colts from his stables have brought fancy prices, and several have gone below the 2:20 record.—La Grande Gazette, Dec. 26, 1890.

## SAGE OF MEDICAL SPRINGS



Hon. Dunham Wright, known throughout the northwest as the sage of Medical Springs, and one of the earliest pioneers in Union county, is pictured above. Mr. Wright not only has watched this section grow into its present development, but had an important part in the upbuilding of the county.

### TOUGH ON THE BABIES

The milk wagon from W. G. Hunter's dairy ranch back of town broke down Monday morn-

ing, and was not able to deliver about 750 pounds of milk for the creamery's first day's run.—La Grande Chronicle, May 17, 1893.

## LA GRANDE BEFORE THE RAILS CAME

How did La Grande appear before the coming of the railroad? Perhaps D. H. Stearns, then writing for the Evening Telegram of Portland, describes it as well as possible in a booklet put out in the year 1882.

"It nestles in a nook in the mountains, sheltered on the north and west, while it stands on a plateau overlooking much of the valley," Stearns wrote. "The Blue Mountain university is the most prominent building in the town, The Masonic hall and Odd Fellows' temple are both fine buildings, and the churches are fair. It has a good hotel, the Blue Mountain House."

Speaking of livery stables, he said: "I found R. W. Deal, of the Fashion Stables, the best man to deal with on the whole. . . . The four principal stores at La Grande are the best kept in the county. The stocks are larger and finer than any other, if we except one at Island City, and one at Union. Snodgrass & Miner may be named as the leading and largest business concern in the county. L. Baer has as large a business house. . . . A. Somer is the third of the heaviest business men in the county, and the oldest merchant."

At that time La Grande was the chief town between Pendleton and Baker City, Stearns wrote. In his story he mentioned W. A. Worstell, the postmaster (Mr. Worstell is well known in this city today).

"Stearns was a bit prophetic, but more than half right, when he expressed the opinion then that 'greater changes have occurred than the unity of all three, La Grande, Oro Dell and Island City, in one prosperous city.'"

Geographically, an interesting situation existed then. "The Grande Ronde river forks at Oro Dell and makes an island six miles in length by an average of a mile in width. Island City is built about midway of the island and takes name therefrom."

### BUYS LIVERY BARN

The livery barn so long known as the "Mahaffey" stable has been purchased by John Baker, and was a few weeks ago removed to a new site on Fifth street.—La Grande Gazette, Dec. 26, 1890.

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