

# COMING OF RAILS BROUGHT END TO THE STAGE COACH

## Mrs. Edith Gekeler Watches Development in Last Half Century

"I did not attend the celebration held in La Grande, July 4, 1884," said Mrs. Edith Gekeler, valley pioneer of 1878. "but I heard the engine whistle which heralded the arrival of the first train into La Grande on that day. Mr. Gekeler and I were living on the Gekeler homestead, the house being located on the Gekeler lane, just a little west of where Roy Spencer now lives. The tents of the construction crews were pitched between our house and Grandpa Gekeler's place. We saw a good deal of the men and heard a lot about the railroad. Of course we knew of the arrival of the first passenger train had been set for the Fourth. Sometime near noon of that day, we began to listen, finally we heard a far distant whistle, then one a little louder, lastly, one long, continuous shriek that announced the train had reached its destination.

"Did you ever feel like crying for joy? Well, that was the way I felt as I stood there and heard the whistle. A hundred and one things crowded into my mind. I saw in my mind's eye, the new vista that had opened and had put us in touch with the outside world.

"The days were over for the rocking stagecoach with its fearless driver and its fractious horses. No more big heavily-loaded freight wagons with their wheels buried to the hub in mud and the horses or oxen encouraged by a black snake and the sulphurous language of the driver. We would now have markets for our live-stock and farm produce. Heretofore we had had no markets, only the scattering mines. The cattle were driven to Cheyenne, Wyo., and the hogs were taken on foot to the mines. Many times though, the hogs were butchered on the farm and made into cured meat and then freighted to the mining towns. The only hay market was the stage station or the freighters. It was baled in a home-made press but now we could have our hay baled in a modern press and have it shipped, the new press to make the same weight but half the size.

"And dairying, I saw a great advancement in that, too. That branch of agriculture consisted of milking cows with the assistance of the calves. During the summer, the butter was made in two-pound rolls, was packed in brine barrels and was freighted to the mines.

"Our wheat, oh joy, at last a market! Outside the grain used for flour and hog feed, there was none, only for the stage and freight horses.

"I did not think entirely of what could be shipped out. I thought, too, of what might be shipped in. One thing, especially, I wanted for myself, glass fruit jars to can fruit in. They were so hard to handle that they were not even freighted in. Then, most of all, top buggies and carriages would eventually come. The old wagon, the box being filled with rawhide bottomed chairs, was the usual mode of travel for the pioneer and his family.

"I came to the valley from Pennsylvania in 1878," Mrs. Gekeler reminisced, "and at that time there were whispers of a railroad but it was so long coming that when it did we could hardly realize it. Never for a minute did we think the little village of Old Town, as we called it, would cover the Grandy grain field, where the Gekeler header had cut the grain."

"I look back with amusement on my first ride on the new railroad. My mother, Mrs. M. E. Carter, of Walla Walla, was visiting me. When she left for home I decided to take my month-old babe (now Mrs. Victor Bagain) and go with her for a visit. In the afternoon of Sept. 1, 1884, we boarded the train at La Grande, rode as far as Umatilla where we got off and waited for two hours. Then we were put in the caboose of a freight train and were taken as far as Wallula where we waited another two hours. Finally we got on a train that took us into Walla Walla. We got there about the middle of the forenoon. Compare that with the speed of 1934—50 years later."

### AN OLD-TIME HOTCHA

The season of the bal masque, popcorn, candy and striped suspenders is again upon us. Sound the jim jam and beat the egg nog.—Editorial in La Grande Gazette, Dec. 26, 1890.

## FOUR ROADS TO WEST IN EARLY DAYS

The Blue mountains, now conquered by rail and highway alike, in early times of immigration to Oregon was one of the greatest obstacles in the way of overland wagon trains. Sometimes months of valuable time was consumed in the perilous task, historians report.

Finally four roads were constructed over them between 1862 and 1868. One was the Meacham road, one farther north the Thomas & Ruckell, another still farther to the north, the Linckton, and another south of the Meacham road, built by the government and later abandoned entirely. The Linckton in those days was passable only in summer.

### MARRIED AT UNION

L. B. Thomas and Miss Frankie Horton, both of La Grande, were married at Union Sept. 20, 1892, with Justice Blakesly officiating. Mr. Thomas is an employe in the U. F. shops here.—La Grande Gazette, Sept. 23, 1892.

## MRS. ANNA OLIVER SAW TRAIN FROM MT. EMILY

The resourcefulness, of which Mrs. Anna Oliver's friends are so well aware, stood her well in hand on that Fourth of July, 50 years ago and gave her a memorable day which otherwise might have been robbed of much of its glamour and thrill because she happened to be one of the younger children in a large family. She was one of the family of John McDonald who pioneered to this valley in 1864, purchasing a tract just north of the present N. K. West ranch. As sometimes happens, the older children in the family managed to secure the conveyances first getting away to La Grande bright and early, and it looked as though the younger children would have to get their knowledge of the first train by hearsay.

But heaven was kind to the children and whether upon the suggestion of the parents, or only with their permission, Anna and some of the others bravely started up the slopes of Mt. Emily to watch the grand entry from the heights of the guardian angel of the valley. They knew the time

the train was supposed to pull in and evidently they were sure of their abilities as climbers for they reached their destination in plenty of time. Mrs. Oliver reports that what they saw was not much more than the stream of smoke from the engine, but it WAS that, and they had this special thrill all their own.

Judging from her present inclinations and desires, Mrs. Oliver is certain that immediately she must have wanted to ride on the train. The opportunity came sometime later when with a friend, she rode clear to Perry in the cab of an engine—her first experience on the steam cars.

### BRANCH TO ELGIN OPENED

The railroad officials have made a special rate for an excursion from La Grande to Elgin next Sunday. The train will leave La Grande at 9:30 and arrive at 5:20 in the evening. This will be the first passenger train over the new branch. Tickets for the round trip will be \$1.—La Grande Gazette, Dec. 26, 1890.

## MT. FANNIE BEARS NAME OF MRS. BROWN

Much has been said and written about Benjamin Brown, who in 1861 erected the first building in La Grande and tilled the soil the first time in the Grande Ronde valley.

Yet, in checking over historical facts, it is learned that one of the mountains in the county bears the name—not of Mr. Brown—but of his wife, Mount Fannie, in the eastern end of the county, was named after Mrs. Brown.

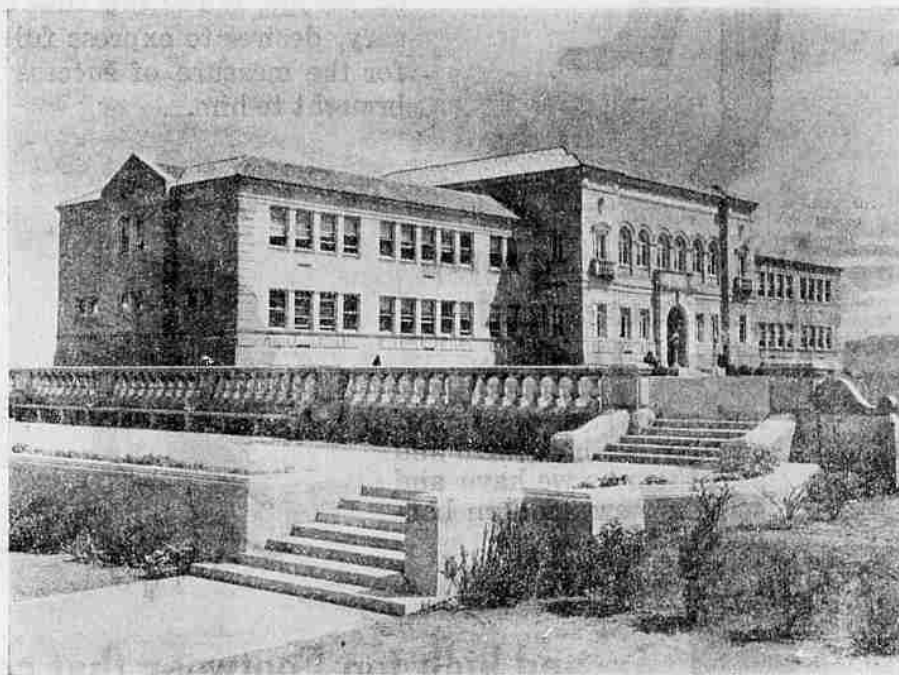
### PLENTY OF BUSINESS

The following statistical information has been furnished the Gazette in regard to the shipment of wool, hides and sheep from La Grande during the last 12 months, and the value of the same:

Eight carloads hides	\$ 8,000
Furs	4,000
Wool, 780,000 lbs.	128,700
Sheep, 40,000 head	80,000

Total value .....\$220,700.

—La Grande Gazette, Dec. 26, 1890.



EASTERN OREGON NORMAL SCHOOL IN LA GRANDE

## LA GRANDE - a good place to live

### Schools and Homes

If you are looking for a place to educate your children—come to La Grande. Large, modern schools—competent teachers—grade schools—High School and the finest educational Normal School in the state. La Grande is a city of beautiful residences and buildings — people who live in La Grande take pride in their homes — They are good neighbors.

### Business Headquarters

Make La Grande your business headquarters. It is geographically the business center of all Eastern Oregon. If your business takes you in any direction—east, west, north or south, you will save time and money by locating here. Investigate the advantages of making La Grande your home and the headquarters for your Eastern Oregon territory.

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