

MAMMEN

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The upper floor, constructed to be both a show-place and a gathering place, was named Steward's Opera House. It was a fine establishment in which entertainment in extravagant ways was provided for the people of La Grande and surrounding areas. There were plays and orchestra performances, and comedians, and vocalists. There were dance lessons and dances, and fancy balls. In 1892 there was an elegant ball with dinner and dancing that had about 600 people in attendance. And there was vaudeville. This was something new to La Grande although it had been popular for some years, having started in France where the name came from the French expression "voice of the city." This was a grouping of nine or ten acts of various sorts — one-act plays, acrobatics, singing, dancing comedy and animal acts. These acts were booked together as they traveled around

the country. They seemed to be quite popular and it seems they had a regular program which included a "dumb" act which came first to allow the patrons of the evening to get into their seats.

Next came the "strong" acts. Those were with a bit more talent or expertise. Then came the weakest act in order to clear the house. An example of a weak act was Burk and Andrus and Their Trained Mule. Early on, tickets to attend a performance at the Opera House cost 25 cents and 35 cents. Later it was up to 50 cents. This doesn't sound like very much but the value today would be between \$7 and \$10 for the early years and as much as \$16.50 in 1897.

The Observer reported that during the 20 years the Opera House was in operation scores of famous actor and actresses made their appearance on this stage in La Grande. With the coming of moving pictures the Opera House was no longer the drawing card for entertainment.

In June of 1913 the second floor was leased to

J. E. Mazanti and B. M. Sherwood who tore out the stage and built a gallery around the floor. By August the second floor was renamed Rex Hall and was used for a variety of activities including a dance academy and later the Red Cross sewing committee met here.

Information from various books by David Horowitz tells us about another usage of Rex Hall. This was being the home of the local Ku Klux Klan chapter which existed from late 1922 to December 1924. It had a confirmed membership of 320 in 1922 with 37% being employees of the Union Pacific Railroad. It was said that the La Grande members were held to a high moral standard and that men joined the chapter "to build networks against what they saw as deteriorating values brought on by the changing times." However, by late 1924 the chapter was in financial difficulties and deteriorated.

In the 1930s the former opera house was painted grey and became La Grande's first

National Guard Armory, according to Dick Mason in The Observer. By the early 1950s, when the National Guard relocated, the second story of the Steward building was no longer used.

Downtown La Grande was a lively bustling place beginning in the late 1890s and the 1200 block was especially so. The lower floor space of the Steward Building was originally divided into three commercial spaces. The businesses occupying these were generally two types — department stores primarily selling clothing and grocery stores.

The first known department store was the Murphy Bros. clothing store operated by the Murphy brothers. They later changed the name to the Chicago Store and added women's clothing. In 1907 the store changed owners again and became the Peoples Store which was a department store selling everything from toothbrushes to kitchen utensils as well as clothing. By September of 1915 Geibel's, one of the largest

stores in the Grande Ronde Valley, moved to this location. Less than a year later the store sold again and Hill's Department Store took up residency and remained for the next 30 years when F. B. Conner purchased the Hill inventory and opened his store.

The earliest store was the Mc Cully and Gilbert grocery followed by the Grandy Grocery Co., Grandy and Romig, then Staples and Romig which was later bought out by J. C. Snodgrass. On Dec. 23, 1933, IGA opened its doors to customers of La Grande at this location.

But two of the most remembered occupants were the first Payless in the United States and Woolworth. Woolworth was located here as early as 1920 and Payless came in next door in 1939. For over 20 years together they provided for the many needs of the citizens of the Grande Ronde Valley. But in January of 1961 the lease Woolworth had with Payless expired and Payless wanted to expand so Woolworth closed during the last week of December

1960 after 40 years of service.

In early 1961 Payless expanded into the space where Woolworth had been. They were there until their closing day on Oct. 29, 1973, when they moved to the Grande Ronde Plaza leaving the Steward Building. This once beautiful, but now vacant, building was soon torn down erasing many years of La Grande's history.

Keep looking up! Enjoy!

Ginny Mammen has lived in La Grande for more than 50 years and enjoys sharing her interest in the history of people, places and buildings.



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HOROSCOPES

by Stella Wilder

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2021
YOUR BIRTHDAY by Stella Wilder
Born today, you have much going for you of which the world at large may not even be aware, but that suits you just fine because you enjoy using the element of surprise to your advantage -- and you certainly can if you have the option of "unveiling" an unsuspected skill or characteristic at just the right time in order to get the maximum possible reaction from others. You are a born entertainer, in fact!

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10
SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) -- Put one foot in front of the other today and progress will surely be made -- whether concretely or more abstractly. Don't let anyone hold you back.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) -- You're paying a little too much attention to what someone else is doing and not enough to what you are doing -- or what you soon have to do.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) -- You may be entering a period marked by stasis and boredom -- but whether it is short or long depends on your resolve. Get to it!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) -- You are learning much from someone who is leading you through unfamiliar territory, and soon you will be teaching another in turn.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) -- It may seem as though external forces are conspiring against you at this time, but you have it in your power to ease negative pressure.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) -- It will be important to you, throughout the day, to look your best and speak with authority. Also, you'll want to speak well of others.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) -- You are concerned with cash flow and profit margins, but today something else is likely to require your immediate attention. Spend wisely!

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) -- You sense that recent pressures are likely to ease, but will that mean that you are ready for what comes? Something new demands attention.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) -- How you make another feel today will be more important, in the long run, than anything you do for yourself. Think outside the box.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) -- You may recognize that someone is trying to trip you up by talking you in circles -- but once you do, their influence over you is sure to end.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) -- You're more concerned with how things will look today than you have been in the past -- but that doesn't mean that substance can be ignored!

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) -- You have what someone wants, but you're not about to let go of it until a fair arrangement has been hammered out. Stand your ground.

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- Baker City Fire Dept.
- Haines Sell-Rite
- Idle Hour
- Salvation Army

DOES EVERYONE KNOW YOUR BUSINESS
Even if you think they do, you'll have to keep reminding them about it.

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS
Monday, Thursday, & Friday
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DOWN

37 Racetrack boundary
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43 Turn aside
44 Tech. school
45 Dot in the Seine
47 Pry bar
49 Stream forth
53 Turkish official
54 "Ghosts" writer
56 Harsh cry
57 Mil. rank
58 Get on a plane
59 One of 10

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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11 Prefix with classic
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23 Actress — Hagen
25 Churns up
26 — and desist
27 Soprano counterpart
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34 Laugh-a-minute
35 Cholera
37 — Russo of "Tin Cup"
39 Bakery fixture
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46 Touch down
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48 The "I"
49 That señora
50 Statute
51 Spiritual "way"
52 Female sheep
55 Derek or Jackson

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