

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SITE REPORT - PALOUSE FARMLANDS

Number 262

Revised December 1981

Historic-site reports contain information designed to assist in two preservation functions. One is preservation planning at the local level. The other is the work of federal agencies in carrying out their responsibilities to comply with historic-preservation requirements prescribed by federal statutes and regulations. These reports summarize local archaeological, historical, and geographical contexts; existing surveys of historic sites; architectural, engineering, industrial; and other cultural resources; and available maps and literature concerning each area. Natural geographical, rather than governmental, boundaries have been used to identify seventy-two areas that vary greatly in size. Site reports reflect a broad cultural and geographical disparity characteristic of diverse regional components found in Idaho, but the areas are designed to incorporate cultural elements of immediate local significance that need to be taken into account for preservation planning.

1. Geographical context: Mostly farther west in Washington, but with an especially favored section in Idaho, this farming area has great natural advantages. Crop failures are nearly unknown, and a considerable diversification of crops in an important wheat country is possible. Rail, highway, and ocean-going river transportation is available. Elevations vary from at Moscow (or maybe Potlatch) to 4,983' on Moscow Mountain--a timbered ridge extending through this area. Potlatch canyon cuts off an extension of this farming region around Southwick, with Kendrick and Juliaetta serving as farming centers at considerably lower elevations.
2. Prehistory and significant archaeological sites: After the last great Missoula-Spokane flood, which surged and splashed from Pasco up Snake River past Lewiston into Idaho some 12,000 years ago, people moved back into Snake and Clearwater canyons, where they have been active ever since. Traces of human occupation of higher canyon and prairie country also go back for eight thousand years or so, and lower Clearwater pit houses have been in use for five thousand years or more.
3. Cultural resource surveys and archaeological literature:
4. Historical summary: Major historical episodes include:

1. Exploration and fur trade, 1812-1858
2. Coeur d'Alene campaign of 1858
3. Initial settlement, 1872-1884
4. Rail service, 1884-1892
5. University of Idaho, 1892-
6. Farm prosperity, 1900-1919
7. Transportation improvement and farm depression, 1920-1932
8. New Deal and wartime adjustments, 1933-1945
9. Advanced farm technology, 1946-

Attractive to settlers because of good soils which did not have to be cleared of timber, and because of reliable precipitation that made expensive irrigation systems unnecessary, the Palouse country of Idaho and Washington offered exceptional opportunities for ambitious frontier farmers following the years of the Clearwater gold rush. Settlement of the interior Columbia basin east of the Cascades gained momentum around Walla Walla following the Coeur d'Alene Indian campaign of 1858, but more than another decade went by before the agricultural frontier advanced beyond the Walla Walla-Lewiston area northward into the Palouse country. Most early Idaho farms depended upon mining markets for rapid development, and the pattern of mining expansion did not encourage immediate exploitation of the Palouse region. Major Coeur d'Alene lead silver discoveries in 1884 reversed this situation, but by that time, rail transportation had assisted a rapid expansion of commercial farming in the Palouse country.

In advance of good commercial outlets for upper Columbia farm products, prices for wheat and other commodities scarcely justified expanded production at the time farmers were entering the Palouse region. Livestock (which had an outlet through long cattle and sheep drives over the Oregon Trail) flourished until 1880, when a hard winter--one of several over a decade or more--retarded cattle ranches severely. By that time, rail transportation was beginning to serve the region. (Until this improvement, farmers had to devise ways to get their wheat down precipitous grades to steamboat landings on the Snake below the rim of a deep canyon.) Completion of the Northern Pacific between Spokane and Portland (delayed for years by the Panic of 1873, which retarded occupation of the Palouse country severely) helped the northern edge of the Palouse region in 1882. A Northern Pacific branch to Colfax in 1884 and an Oregon Railway and Navigation line to Moscow in 1885 developed the country rapidly after that. (These lines had been developed as part of Henry Villard's Pacific Northwest rail empire; after they split in January 1884, a basis was established for transportation competition.) When the Union Pacific acquired control over the OR and N in January, 1887, the Northern Pacific was

assigned the Palouse country in a territorial division intended to confine the Union Pacific to the region south of the Snake. (The Union Pacific had gained access to the Coeur d'Alene region and continued to penetrate other territory north of the Snake in a rivalry that kept both lines nervous for a number of years.) As a result of this division, the Northern Pacific extended service all the way through the Palouse region to Genessee by June 1888. Lewiston hoped to get a line extended from Kendrick in 1894--a project interrupted by the Panic of 1893. But by that time, the Palouse country had adequate service which still was denied to Lewiston and Camas Prairie farther south. On that account, Palouse farms expanded more rapidly than Camas Prairie, which also was retarded by lack of white access to the Nez Perce reservation.

By 1890, four major centers had developed in the Palouse region: Moscow, the largest, prospered as a railhead; Colfax, which had an advantage of early rail service, continued to thrive; Palouse City had an additional advantage from some neighboring Idaho gold placers; Pullman, which had got off to a late start, had an asset of two rail lines representing the Northern Pacific and Union Pacific by 1888. Moscow, which had gained the University of Idaho in 1889, commenced to profit from that institution which opened in 1892, while Pullman soon followed with Washington's land-grant institution. As a result, the Palouse country emerged with no single dominant internal center, but as part of a broader Columbia basin area served by Spokane.

5. Historical documentation and literature:
6. Historic sites inventory:
7. Industrial archaeological and engineering sites summary:
8. Architectural resources:
9. United States Geological Survey Maps:

Ahsahka (15') 1961
 Clarkston 1971
 Deary (15') 1961
 Farmington 1964
 Kendrick (15') 1961
 Lapwai 1972
 Lewiston Orchards North 1972
 Moscow (15') 1961
 Moscow East 1960
 Moscow Mountain 1960
 Moscow West 1964
 Palouse 1964
 Robinson Lake 1960
 Troy 1960

Uniontown 1964
Viola 1964

10. Cultural resource management recommendations:

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