Benjamin H. Lewis
Man of Faith, Music, & Numbers
by Peter Coffin

Benjamin Lewis moved to the future Deer Park area in 1891 from Spokane. He had been born near Swansea, Wales, in October 1851, and later moved to Cardiff, Wales, from where he moved to Spokane. His 1889 move from Wales to Spokane must have been a serious undertaking. He had married Sarah in 1882 and by the time of the move they had three children, David H. (born in December 1885), May (born in April 1888) and Edwin B. (born in April 1889).

Deer Park was only a portable sawmill site along the Spokane Falls and Northern Railroad when Benjamin Lewis and his family moved to the area. He managed to purchase a quarter section of land to farm from the railroad (southwest quarter, Section 27-Township 29 North-Range 42 East WM on Dragoon Creek approximately one mile north-northwest of the *Short and Crawford portable sawmill). Shortly after arriving in Deer Park his family became larger when Rachel M. (born August 1890) and Benjamin H. Jr. (born August 1898) were born.

During the 1890s the Short family, along with other community members, organized the Congregational Church. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis and their family became charter members of the church. Benjamin was well trained in music and a gifted singer. Several Deer Park Tribune newspaper front pages contained articles about the Congregational Church’s religious services. In addition Mr. Lewis taught Sunday school classes.

Besides farming his land, he was a book keeper for the Standard Lumber Company owned by William H. Short. In March, 1914, Standard Lumber Company was sold to Leuthold and Wilson and became the Deer Park Lumber Company and after that time he was elected treasurer for the city of Deer Park. He was repeatedly elected to that office until his death in 1934.

He and his wife believed in education

“See Mortarboard issue #74, page 897, Peter Coffin’s “Deer Park’s First Sawmill Moves,“ for further details about the Short and Crawford portable sawmill.”
and all of his children received education beyond high school. His son Edwin had attended Washington State College and collectively edited by the Senior Class of 1915, this 5 ¼ x 8½ inch, 68 page book is in remarkably good condition. As regards that condition, society president Bill Sebright noted, “Marilyn — a postcard collector — said she found the book while engaged in her hobby. As for how it stayed so pristine for the last 99 years,” Bill could only wonder.

Tragedy struck in September of 1919 when his son Edwin B. drowned in Deer Park Lumber’s mill pond while saving the life of a nine year old boy who had fallen into the pond while playing on the logs. Benjamin H. Lewis was a dedicated public servant working at his desk as city treasurer. He died at his city hall desk on March 20, 1934, at age 83. His wife Sarah died in 1938 and both are buried in the Woodland Cemetery.

**Above:** 1905 land ownership map of a portion of Township 29 North-Range 42 East WM showing the farm tract that Benjamin Lewis owned.

This spring, Marilyn (Strong) Taylor donated a copy of the earliest known and likely first ever Deer Park High School annual to the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society. Titled the Senior Cycle and collectively edited by the Senior Class of 1915, this 5 ¼ x 8½ inch, 68 page book is in remarkably good condition. As regards that condition, society president Bill Sebright noted, “Marilyn — a postcard collector — said she found the book while engaged in her hobby. As for how it stayed so pristine for the last 99 years,” Bill could only wonder.

“Deer Park’s first high school — having since been converted to the town’s city hall — was built in the summer of 1911. The earliest known mention of the new school is found on page 4 of the July 7th, 1911, issue of the Deer Park Union — which coincidently is the oldest currently known surviving issue of Deer Park’s newspaper. As just a notation, the article headlines, “Bonds, yes!” And then goes on, “The school election held last Monday resulted in a landslide strictly in favor of building the new school house. There were 192 votes cast — 189 for and 3 against it, and the three could not be found after the election.”

Once open, adjustment had to be made to best utilize the new school’s space. As the Union reported from a November meeting of the school board, “Principal C. E. Studebaker ... talked along the line of improving the schools and suggested that Miss Mor-

The First Known Deer Park High School Annual:
Reviewing the 1915 “Senior Cycle”
by Wally Lee Parker

The article doesn’t specify that the new school would be a high school. That’s likely because it appears, as noted below, that it wasn’t originally intended as such exclusively.

Three weeks later another mention is made in the Union. This, just one line buried in a local news column, simply states “Our new school building is well under way and when finished will be one of the best in the state.”

In mid-August the following article suggested that the project was coming together with remarkable speed — at least by today’s standards.

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The Deer Park Union. August 18, 1911. Page 6, column 2.


(*)Note: For further information on the original high school building, see society member Marie Morrill’s “From Deer Park High School in 1911 to Deer Park City Hall Today” in issue 950 (June, 2012) of the Mortarboard.
Deer Park High School Faculty: 1914 — 1915

W. O. Cummings, B. S.
Iowa State Teachers College
State College of Washington
Superintendent of Schools and Instructor in Science and History.

Jessie M. Eastman, B. A.
Carleton College
Instructor in English and German

Mary E. Wiley
Instructor in Music

Mrs. Alice T. Cutts, B. A.
Middlebury College
Seattle Business College
Instructor in Latin, Algebra, and Commercial Work

May A. Rowe, B. S.
Beloit College
Chicago University
Washington State College
University of Wisconsin
Instructor in Home Economics, Botany and Geometry

Windsor Drisko
State College of Washington
Instructor in Manual Arts and Drawing

Deer Park High School Faculty: 1914 — 1915

ris’ room, 6th and 7th grades, be moved to the new building.”

From this and other documents it appears that the 8th, 9th, and 10th grades were already housed at the new school. As for whether there was an 11th and 12th grade — whether the new high school was intended to be a two or four-year institution — the Union appears to contradict itself on that matter.

An article appearing on page 6 of the Deer Park Union’s Christmas issue — in reference to the opportunities the community provides — quite clearly states, "There is a two-year high school established and accredited, being recognized by the Spokane High School, Cheney State Normal, Pullman State College — all accepting graduates therefrom.”

In the same Christmas issue, but on page one under the headline “Deer Park High School Notes,” the Union states, “The debate between the 11th and 9th grades took place Monday afternoon, in which the higher classmate won the decision of the judges, who were Mr. Raymond, Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Tuttle. Other visitors were present. All the debaters won the admiration of those who listened to them discuss the subject of direct election of United States senators. Edna Clayton, Roy Mix and Mont. Chadbourne of the 11th grade, the winners, had the negative side, and Lyle Dennison, Wallace Daniel and James Desmond upheld the affirmative.”

The December Union’s sixth page article — the one characterizing the new “two-year high school” as being “established and accredited” was contradicted by the following Union article, published five months later.

hope he will succeed. Several changes are contemplated by the board in regard to additional studies, etc., and no stone will be left unturned to put the Deer Park High school in the front rank."

As noted in the Union article quoted in paragraph seven on page 923 of this issue, the superintendent for the first year of the high school's existence was C. E. Studebaker (Clement Earl Studebaker — no known relation to the automotive Studebakers). So far the only other mention of this teacher is located in a Spokesman-Review article from the late spring of 1912. Said article, recounting the plans various Deer Park teachers had for the coming summer, noted that "Superintendent Studebaker will improve his ranch near Deer Park."

It appears that Principal Clark obtained his stated goal of full accreditation by the next summer, with Deer Park being listed among the state's accredited four-year high schools in a publication titled Washington High School Directory: 1913-1914 — said listing noted as being "Correct" as of June, 1913.

The above volume also stated that the high school's enrollment stood at 44 as of November 1st, 1913. Including Mr. Clark, five Deer Park High School instructors were listed among the state's accredited four-year high schools in a publication titled Washington High School Directory: 1913-1914 — said listing noted as being "Correct" as of June, 1913.

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By the next school year — the school year in which the Senior Cycle was produced — the faculty had expanded by one, with three of the prior year's teachers including Principal Clark having moved on (only Rowe and Eastman remained).

A listing of the 1914-1915 faculty, along with photos extracted from the first Senior Cycle, are posted on the pages 924 and 925 — with W. O. Cummings noted as the high school's new principal.

As for the Senior Cycle itself — which has managed to survive a century and still displays itself nicely — it's stated as having been printed in May of 1915 by J. H. Johnson; Mr. Johnson also being the owner and editor of the Deer Park Union at that time.

J. H. Johnson's place in Deer Park's history was first documented in the July 7th, 1911, edition of the Deer Park Union, where it's noted that, "Mr. J. H. Johnson of Chicago has purchased the Deer Park Union. He intends to run a strictly first class country paper independent in politics, but to do everything in his power to boost Deer Park and vicinity. He solicits the patronage of all the merchants and will do all in power to merit the same. Please do not take this week's issue as a criterion, but have a little patience as it takes some time to get the paper back on its feet. In a couple of weeks we will be thoroughly equipped to do all kinds of job work in first-class shape."

It appears that the 1915 Senior Cycle was one such "job work."

Little is known of Johnson's subsequent history. After leaving his owner/editor position at the Deer Park Union, he and his photos from "The Senior Cycle," May, 1915.
wife, Emma, moved back to the Midwest — to Wisconsin.

According to the (9)Spokane Chronicle, Emma returned to the area after J. H. passed away and married Deer Park’s legendary and recently widowed Dr. H. H. Slater. Emma died in 1947, a year after Dr. Slater.

If typical of his work, the craftsmanship evident in the Senior Cycle suggests that J. H. “Harry” Johnson was a reasonably skilled publisher.

As for the senior class itself, in their “Class History” — page 13 of the Senior Cycle — they noted, “The class of 1915 has the distinction of being the first class that has taken the entire four-year course in the Deer Park High School. Four years ago the present class consisted of sixteen members. However, only three of that number, Mildred Renshaw, Emma James and Lyle Denison, have completed the course. Anna Fornfeist and Merle Shaver have entered the class during the Senior year.”

Though the fact that only “five” graduated from a class that began four years earlier with 16 students seems below average, it falls close to the statewide medium as published in (10)The Washington High School Directory: 1913-1914 — in which it was stated, “Approximately one pupil out of every three entering the elementary grades enters high school in this state.” And, “Approximately one pupil out of every three entering high school graduates from high school.”

The above directory reports there were 3,817 students enrolled in Washington State high schools during the 1912-1913 school year — the last complete year of statistics available in that particular directory. We can compare that to the (11)327,873 students reported enrolled in the state’s public high schools as of October, 2013. Washington’s high schools graduated just over (12)64,000 students in 2012 — which places the current probability of graduating for students entering high school at just over 75%.

Back then, high school was an option for relatively few. How few can be deduced by comparing the number of students attending high school in the early years of the respective centuries to the 1910 federal census estimate for the population of Washington State — which stood at 1,141,990 — and the 2010 estimate which stands at 6,724,540.

As for the quality of education between now and then, common wisdom generally considers that high school graduates from the early 20th century were — as far as overall education is concerned — comparable to college graduates from the beginning of the 21st century. Nothing from the Senior Cycle would suggest such common wisdom is in error. For example, the following “Debate Notes” from page 39 of the Senior Cycle.

“The debating team of 1914 set a record of which the Deer Park High School can be very proud. The team was composed of Emma James, Mildred Renshaw, Edith Reed, and William Short. Although it was their first year at this work, and also the first year that Deer Park was represented in the interscholastic debates, they tied for second place with the Lewis and Clark High School of Spokane. Deer Park won three out of four


We also have a photocopy of Clayton High School’s 1924 annual. Although the donation of any hardcopies for the missing years would be appreciated, the important thing is the data these perishable time capsules contain. For our purpose the privilege of making high definition photocopies of any of the issues missing from our list would be extremely helpful in allowing us to fulfill our mission of collecting materials of historical significance to the local community and then of engaging in the “art of making this common heritage accessible to the public” — which is also the function of this newsletter.

If you have a vintage Deer Park or Clayton High School annual suitable for donation or photocopying, please contact society president Bill Sebright at either sebrightba@gmail.com or (509) 276-2653.

The Class of 1917: Florence James, Edward Peterson, Myrtle DeVoe, Ruth Garver, Mable Hunt, Helen DeVoe, Myra Taylor, Gertrude Alberthal, and Edith Johnson.

The Class of 1916: Rose Eastland, Muriel Enman, Donald Reed, Sarah Enman, Floyd Wolfe, Naomi Dunham, Florence Reetz, Bert Moore, Stella Shonkwilet, Beatrice Gollan, and Howard James.

The Class of 1915: Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society Newsletter

Issue #76 — August — 2014

Letters, Email, Bouquets & Brickbats

— or —

Bits of Chatter, Trivia & Notices All Strung Together

... the last whistle ...

In July, the C/DPHS’s president, Bill Sebright, sent out a general email announcing that Marc Stelting, “in honor of his Dad, and grandfather, Jim,” had donated a bell — the type that uses a cord-activated mechanical clapper to strike a hemispherical gong — to the society (see photo page 935). This particular bell was once used in the old Clayton brick plant — something to do with the operation of a clay conveyer. That donation brought up the subject of historic bells and whistles throughout the community — and specifically the steam whistles at the Clayton and Deer Park factories.

At least one of the emails forwarded to your editor’s desk suggested not everyone in the area penetrated by such mellow wails was happy with those community wide calls to work, lunch, and then home. They considered it intrusive and somewhat similar to the whistles alluded to in the classic science fiction movie Metropolis (I say alluded to since the movie, released back in 1926, was silent). In the movie, steam whistles called an army of spiritless workers who then, in column after column, shuffled lockstep to their work stations.

Remembering that your elderly editor had been one of those shuffling into Deer Park’s sawmill back in the day, Bill asking how long I’d worked there — and if I recalled when the company had ceased operation. I replied, “I worked primarily in the cut-shop from the late summer of 1966 until about February or March of 1971 — that was when the mill was being phased out — by that time being shut down section by section as the last few orders worked their way through the system.”

“My first winter at the mill the cutshop was closed for about three months due to a recession in the housing industry, and I, like the other new hires, was laid off until the orders picked up in the early spring of ’67. We scaled back a few other times in the years after, but I had enough seniority by then that I was usually just bumped to a lower paying job or moved to a different part of the shop.

For all those years, whether or not we were going to stay in business was a subject of rumor.”

As for resenting those whistles, most working class people live by the whistle in one way or another. It’s just that ... clock bites into a sliver of cardstock bearing the worker’s name. And some are just a boss’s cranky voice yelling “get back to work” — or a colorful, possibly profane variation thereof.

Though he seldom used profanity, Art Roll was cut-shop supervisor at the sawmill. He had an elevated office on the south side of the shop — elevated at least 10 feet above the floor so he could visually sweep the entire shop through the glass-paned windows that lined three sides of the heated Visional office (one of the few areas in the cut-shop heated in the winter). At times you’d look around and he’d be sitting at his desk. Other times he’d be propped against the railing at one of the stairway’s landings. Some times he’d be prowling the floor. Regardless, there wasn’t much happening he wouldn’t know about.

If there was a spot for new hires open in the summer, the company made it a habit to take on college kids as a way of helping them
head from side to side. And the kid just keeps getting more and more frustrated. Finally the kid storms off. Art looks at all of us, shrugged his shoulders, grins, and waddles up the stairs to his office.

Story was the kid took the matter of Art not taking him back over to the main office — over to the plant’s superintendent, Harvey Coe. Seems the main office unsympathetically explained that the circumstance of his departure didn’t merit a rehire. Hopefully the kid learned something about working in the real world from the time he had wanted off, and — assuming no one else with more seniority wanted that same block of time — it’s possible he’d get the time off. But, since the index finger is the one we call the “come here” manner, and waited for the kid’s approach and — eventual-ly — full attention.

I say Art curled his index finger, though I can’t state that as a certainty. It was a rare employee that had worked in the cut-shop very long and still had all his fingers. As I recall, Art was missing random lengths of more than one. I just can’t remember which.

Anyway, whatever the conversation, it was drowned out by the rising racket as the cut-shop came to life. There was the screeching shrill of the dry planers just a dozen feet away all pitched whistles (inside my ears likely associated with four and a half years of that.) There was the slap of wood as the cut-off saws came to life. And then the upward winding of chippers, vacuums, and dozens of smaller electric motors. Whatever one-way communication was occurring between the two — the kid standing slack-jawed for the majority of it — it caused Art to turn even ruddier than usual.

After that the kid continued to run in just as the whistle was blowing — it being a matter of principle I suspect. But at least he wasn’t late anymore.

The sawmill was ripe with what was clearly gossip. Some of that came from the mill’s foremen — though I’m sure none would own up to it. It’s possible a portion of that was management communicating with the workers by other than official means. But occasionally the official anti-scuttlebutt policy would break down and we’d hear some gossip from the bosses themselves. For example, there was the recent Deer Park graduate hired out to fill a vacancy left by a college kid going back to school at the end of the summer. The new kid had worked for just a few weeks in the cut-shop before he left to go back to school. Art waited for the kid to show up and — past the time he’d been expected, and — assuming no one else with more seniority wanted that same block of time — he’d gotten the time off. As for the sawmill shutting down, we were informed of the fact just before the end of shift on Monday, the 28th of December, 1970. That was our first day back after our three day Christmas break. Harvey Coe, the plant’s superintendent, called the factory workers into the cut-shop/molding area and announced that the entire sawmill was closing down permanently.

An article in the next day’s Spokane-Review stated that Harvey “read the notice to some 200 workers at the lumber mill shortly after he received it Monday after-noon,” then quoted him as having said, “None of us had any idea it was going to happen.” As I recall, one of the more vocal wag in our totally flummoxed group asked Harvey why the company had waited till after Christmas to let the employees know. Harvey answered that they likely wanted everyone to have a good holiday first. To which the wag responded that if we’d known we’d soon be without work we wouldn’t have spent money we didn’t have buying Christmas presents we could no longer afford.

So much for our “good holiday.” I still suspect the corporation’s big wigs really waited till after Christmas to avoid having to deal with banner headlines comparing them to Ebenezer Scrooge. And it seemed that most everything we heard from them after was heavily laced with corporate spin. For example, in its December 29th article the Review noted that the sawmill’s corporate owner, Potlatch Forests Inc., (then in the process of selling Deer Park’s woodlands to Boise Cascade) intended to “try to help the Deer Park plant employees to either relocate or find new employment in the area” — which eventually boiled down to little more than a one-time offer to those with enough seniority to take available jobs at other company owned operations often hundreds of miles away from their homes.
Looking back, it’s reasonable to assume that at least a few local people were in fact irritated by the sound of the sawmill’s whistle — just like a few Clayton people were likely irritated by the brick plant’s whistle. But most probably took a more pragmatic view. To them those whistles meant food on the table and heat in the house. To most it was a clockwork reminder that wages were coming into the community. When those whistles went silent — when the era of Clayton and Deer Park as company towns faded away — it meant hard times and a difficult adjustment for most everyone.

And as always, the society invites anyone with anecdotes and/or photos of the old sawmill to share them with our readers.

—— Wally Lee Parker ——

In attendance: Peter Coffin, Judy Coffin, Sue Rehms, Wally Parker, Pat Parker, Betty Burdette, Mike Reiter, Bob Gibson, Donald Ball, Don Reiter, Mary Jo Reiter, Marilyn Reilly, Grace Hubal, Mark Wagner, Bill Sebright, Lorraine Nord, Jody Lentz, and Kay Parkin.

Society President Bill Sebright called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He reported: 1) Lynn Wells took pictures of the brick hangar at Felts Field and the two “Aces of Spades” on the building (access through Spokane Turbine Center). With Sue Richart’s (Crossroads Project) help, Bill copied a page from an online copy of the Clayton Terra Cotta book which showed that the “Aces” came from Clayton. Thanks Lynn and Sue! 2) Bill met with Marc Stelting, Art’s son, who presented the Society with a $500 check as per Art’s wishes. He also donated a bell from the Brickyard clay shed at the Clayton Brickyard. It was rung every time a load of clay came up the conveyor. 3) Plans have been made for displays at Settlers, Brickyard Day, and Clayton Fair. Mark signed a “Hold Harmless Agreement” necessary for the booth at Settlers this year.

Society Treasurer, Mark Wagner reported: That the ending balance for the main checking account as of June 30 was $3,336.32. Society Secretary Grace Hubal reported: I sent out 2 thank you notes for Warren Nord memorials and a thank you card to Marc Stelting.

Society Vice President Pete Coffin reported: The project I have been trying to complete before Settlers Celebration is a set of township ownership maps for the following townships: T27N-R41E, T27N-R42E, T28N-R41E, T28N-R42E, T29N-R41E, T29N-R42E, T29N-R41E, T29N-R24E. In Spokane County they will cover homesteader ownership, 1905 ownership, 1912 ownership, 1930/1933 ownership, 1940 ownership and 1950 ownership. In Stevens County I have been unable to find a source for 1905 or 1912 ownership data. Pete displayed the maps for all to look at before, during, and after the meeting.

Print editor, Wally Parker reported: 1) The July Mortarboard, #75, includes “100 Year Old Arcadia Orchards Artifact Uncovered During Recent Work in Downtown Deer Park,” “Floyd Lorenzo Daggett, Insurance Salesman, Spokane Mayor, Arcadia Orchards Entrepreneur,” and “Clayton Grade School - 1924: The Writing on the Wall.” 2) Brought to the meeting — 100 copies of Mortarboard #75 (July), and 20 copies of the Collected Newsletters, Volume Nineteen. Volume Nineteen includes Mortarboard #72 through #75. 3) And just as a reminder for anyone attending events that may be of interest to the readers of the Mortarboard, take a camera (digital) and a notepad, and if you see a story opportunity — something that might work well in the Mortarboard — snap lots of photos and jot down whatever info you can to accompany those photos. If you can get a phone number or email address that might lead to additional information about your photos, get those too. That will give the editorial staff (currently one) an opportunity to follow up on any materials that seem likely to result in a story. Also, if there’s any “free” printed materials available at said event, grab an extra copy for Print Publications. If your notes and photos are included in the Mortarboard, such “grabbed” materials might supply information useful in setting up the background.

Society Webmaster, Marie Morrill posted Mortarboard Issue #74 on the website. Penny Hutton reported by email that the Westerners are planning 2 tours for this summer. One is to the Ferry County City of Republic on July 31st. The Patsy Clark Gold Mine will be the main destination. Here is a link to the Republic Historical Museum, http://www.ferrycountymhs.org/index.html. The sec...
Volunteer proofreaders for this issue: Patricia Parker, Bill Sebright, and Lina Swain.

Society Contacts
We encourage anyone with observations, concerns, corrections, or divergent opinions regarding the contents of these newsletters to write to the society or contact one or more of the individuals listed below. Resultant conversations can remain confidential if so desired.

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— C/DPHS ——