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2009

# Washington Territory's Klickitat County (1861-1893): Christian Beginnings in an Isolated Corner

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## Washington Territory's Klickitat County (1861–1893)

### *Christian Beginnings in an Isolated Corner*

JERRY RUSHFORD

The American Restoration Movement (Churches of Christ/Christian Churches) had its origins in West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee in the early years of the nineteenth century. It grew rapidly in the Midwestern states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, and following the Civil War many members of the movement migrated to the northwest corner of the country. This essay focuses on Christian beginnings in isolated and sparsely-populated Klickitat County in Washington Territory.

The members of the Restoration Movement who migrated to Washington Territory in the nineteenth century insisted on calling themselves "Christians." However, they did not imply by this preference that they were the only Christians. On the contrary, they were motivated by an intense desire to unify all professing believers into one church family. It was their aversion to all denominational distinctions that drove them to insist on a pure speech in Biblical matters. With an obvious depth of passion, Thomas Campbell admonished members of the movement to never relinquish the precious right of wearing the name "Christian" for the very reason that it was consistent with what they had been about from the beginning, namely "the restoration of pure, primitive, apostolic Christianity in letter and spirit, in principle, and practice."<sup>1</sup>

The Restoration Movement arrived in Klickitat County in Washington Territory in March of 1861 when Meriel S. Short and his wife, Louise, settled south of Goldendale near the Columbia River. They had been

living in Marion County, Oregon following their marriage in 1859. They were most likely members of the Bethany Church of Christ in that area. The Shorts filed on a Klickitat County homestead where the wagon road from Columbus started to climb over the Columbia hills.<sup>2</sup>

The Shorts were devout members of the Church of Christ. M. S. Short had been baptized into Christ in Indiana in 1845, and one his brothers, Washington Short, was a preacher in the Church of Christ for more than fifty years.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Short owned a blacksmith shop on the Columbus Road for 5 years and he also served as the first mail carrier ("Pony Express" on a saddle horse) for Klickitat County. One account says: "He was a short, stockily built man . . . because of this the pioneers christened him with the nickname of Pony."<sup>4</sup>

In 1866 Short moved his family to Chamberlin Flat on the Columbia River and engaged in cattle raising. One source notes: "In 1875 he organized a church on Chamberlin Flat. This church was later moved to Goldendale."<sup>5</sup> Another account confirms that "in 1875 he organized his first church with ten members."<sup>6</sup> This 1875 congregation on Chamberlin Flat may not have continued to meet, or it may have only met sporadically. Three years later, when Short organized a church at Spring Creek schoolhouse near Goldendale, he called it "the first Christian Church east of the Cascade Mountains and north of the Columbia River."<sup>7</sup>

T. D. Adams observed:

Meriel (Pony) Short wished to become a minister in the Campbellite faith, but the church never licensed him to preach in my knowledge. However, some of the young people urged him to preach. I have heard my brother, Elder J. E. Adams, say that he knew Pony Short was called to preach for he helped call him. After he moved to Chamberlin Flat on the Columbia River he continued to preach at Pleasant Valley and other places.<sup>8</sup>

Actually, Short was ordained to the Christian ministry in October 1881.<sup>9</sup> This ceremony may only have consisted of the leaders of the Goldendale Church laying hands on Short and praying for God's blessings on his ministerial efforts, but he always remembered their confidence in him and he was always faithful to his ministerial responsibilities. He became one of the most respected church leaders in Klickitat County. One history recorded that he was "a minister of the Church of Christ, engaged in farming and stock raising" and that he was "one of Klickitat's earliest and most honored pioneer citizens."<sup>10</sup>

The Methodists were ahead of the Christians in establishing a presence in Klickitat County. They organized their first congregation at a camp meeting in the fall of 1871, and they erected a meetinghouse in Goldendale in 1872. The Christians built their church house in Goldendale in 1879.<sup>11</sup>

When the Edmund B. Robertson family moved from Oregon to Klickitat County in the 1870s, M. S. Short welcomed a co-laborer in the gospel. He and Robertson rode together on a circuit around Goldendale preaching in meetings and encouraging the Christians to organize churches. In February 1878 they held a meeting at Spring Creek school-house northwest of Goldendale and were successful in organizing a congregation of ten members.

Nearly four years later, Short reflected back on this historic meeting in a letter to the editor of the *American Christian Review* in Cincinnati, Ohio. He wrote:

The rise and progress of the Christian cause in this country dates from the 22nd of February next, four years ago. At that time Bro. Robertson and myself with eight others met at Spring Creek and organized the first Christian Church east of the Cascade Mountains and north of the Columbia River in Washington Territory. Our number was ten, all told.<sup>12</sup>

For the next two years, Short and Robertson worked to enlarge the Klickitat County congregation. Sometimes the church met at Spring Creek and sometimes at Goldendale, but it was the same congregation. Progress was slow, but Short and Robertson got an unexpected break in the summer of 1879 when a veteran preacher from Missouri, Robert Milne, arrived in the county.

In a July 22, 1879 letter to the *American Christian Review*, Short wrote:

We have had two meetings in this month, two days each—one at Goldendale, the other at Spring Creek—but the same congregation, or nearly so, we having but one organized body in this country. We had a good, large audience; the people behaved very well indeed. Since our last report, we have received in all, eighteen by letter and recommendation, some not having letters; two by faith, confession and baptism—making a total of twenty new additions; and more came forward and confessed the Lord, that we expect will be baptized the first Lord's day in next month,

according to their request. Some of the new additions were from the Baptist and some from the M. E. Church. The brother that did the preaching is lately from Missouri. His name is R. Milne . . . He is able to use the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, to the best advantage . . . We shall do all we can to help him along in doing good. This is to let you know that we are trying to do something for the cause away over here in Klickitat, W. T. The *A. C. Review* is doing good.<sup>13</sup>

Less than two weeks later, and writing again from Spring Creek, Short provided the *American Christian Review* with another progress report:

We closed a meeting at Goldendale, in this county, August 2 with good results, having received ten additions: one who had been a member of the Christian Church; two who had been baptized, we did not learn by whom; five by faith, confession and baptism. The same brother, Milne, is laboring for us. The church thinks of keeping him for a year. We have now about fifty-five members, with good prospects for more. We have got a subscription for a church-house, and have almost enough to put it up. So you may see that we have but started here in the good work. When we get our house up we shall try to have a Sunday-school started.<sup>14</sup>

In a January 27, 1882 letter to the *American Christian Review*, Short looked back on the progress of four years and wrote:

Our number was ten, all told. Bro. Robertson and myself labored for about eighteen months and had collected about thirty members. I tried to preach the first sermon ever made by the Christian order in the old school house in the town of Goldendale, about two years ago, to a few faithful ones. About this time Bro. Milne came to this country and preached once a month at Goldendale. We built a house at this place and the organization was located here, accumulating about seventy-five names, principally of emigrants locating in this country.<sup>15</sup>

Several sources confirm that the Christians erected a meetinghouse in Goldendale in 1879 on the southwest corner of Third and Court streets.<sup>16</sup> Although there have been a number of renovations over the past 130 years, some of the original building remains in the current facility used by the Church of Christ. It is the oldest church building still in use in Goldendale.

A new town named Centerville, located about eight miles southwest of Goldendale, was platted in 1877. In that same year a small group of Christians settled in Centerville and began to meet for prayer and Bible study in the local school house. Prominent among this group were Frederick and Emily Eshelman and their children who had migrated from Missouri. These Christians would meet in the Centerville school house and in private homes for nearly seven years before organizing themselves as a church in January of 1884.<sup>17</sup>

With the Centerville Christians meeting regularly in the Centerville school house and the Spring Creek/Goldendale congregation meeting regularly in either the Spring Creek school house or its own new church house in Goldendale, Short and Robertson began to set their sites on establishing a congregation in Pleasant Valley about eleven miles to the east of Goldendale. In a February 2, 1880 letter to the *American Christian Review*, Short wrote:

It has been some time since you had any news from us, as I had nothing good to send. I think we have good news now. Bro. Robertson and myself held a protracted meeting in Pleasant Valley commencing the fourth Lord's day in January and ending Wednesday night, with fourteen additions—nine by confession, four by immersion and one from the Baptists. Four had belonged, and were reclaimed. There is not any church organization in Pleasant Valley of any kind yet. The Methodists have been holding prayer-meetings in the neighborhood, and met with us and assisted in carrying on the meeting. There was a good degree of love manifested among the people during our stay with them. We have got our church house in Goldendale, so we can hold meetings in it. We have preaching in it once a month by Bro. Milne; reading and prayer-meeting once a week. Bro. Milne preaches at Spring Creek once a month.<sup>18</sup>

In the January 27, 1882 letter in the *American Christian Review*, Short described his actions after building the meetinghouse in Goldendale and the strengthening of the Spring Creek/Goldendale congregation. He reported:

Bro. Robertson and I held the first Christian meeting in Pleasant Valley, resulting in the confession of forty persons, who were baptized. Brethren Milne and Hunt also did some preaching there, adding about twenty-two more to the membership. Bro. Robertson and I, within the past 5 months, have added thirteen

new members—eight by confession and baptism and five from the other denominations, principally from the M. E. Church. Our total membership in the county now is about one hundred and twenty. We have four ordained preachers, six elders, two churches—one house built by the church at Goldendale. The church at Pleasant Valley have one ordained preacher—Meriel S. Short—who was ordained October last. The church there is in a flourishing condition at present. We hold prayer-meetings twice each week, preaching two times a month, and the brothers and sisters manifest much of the spirit of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Plans were made to conduct a camp-meeting near Goldendale in the summer of 1880. A correspondent named J. W. Fulton sent a report of this meeting to the editor of the *Pacific Christian Messenger* in Monmouth, Oregon. He wrote:

During the past week the brethren of Goldendale have been holding a camp-meeting a few miles from the town. It commenced on Saturday, June 26th, and closed on Sunday, July 4th. Quite a number were present and intense interest was manifested throughout the meeting. All seemed to be in unison and harmony, and united prayer went up to the God of heaven. Love seemed to flow freely from heart to heart, while sweet Gospel songs of praise rang through the woodland with an echo—"God is love."

Satan and his emissaries were driven back to their hiding places and the Gospel of Christ triumphed, not only in the conversion of sinners, but also in building up those already in the faith.

The brethren of this place should be commended for their zeal and piety, and the warm brotherly feeling they have for one another.

During the meeting there were two added to the church by immersion and one by relation. The preaching brethren present were Bros. Robert Milne, J. W. Elder, D. P. Hewitt and D. F. Gilstrap; also two others, Jacob Eshelman and F. N. Roberts, who have just started into the ministry by preaching their first sermon. An uncommon occurrence which took place at the meeting is that a brother sixty years old (J. W. Burnett) preached his first public discourse, and a person over sixty-five years of age obeyed the Gospel.

A protracted meeting conducted by R. H. Moss, of Oregon, will commence at Goldendale on Friday evening before the third Sunday in August.<sup>20</sup>

Just prior to the beginning of the Goldendale camp-meeting, some stirring news reached the Christians who were living in Washington Territory. The news bulletin came out of the Republican National Convention meeting in Chicago, Illinois, on Tuesday, June 8, 1880. It was reported that a former Christian preacher and Christian college president, Representative James A. Garfield from Ohio, had been nominated as the Republican candidate for President of the United States. There were numerous articles in the nation's press inquiring about Garfield's religious affiliation, and the Christians began to acquire a level of recognition they had not enjoyed before.

No letters were sent to the church papers giving the results of the summer meeting with Rufus H. Moss, but in the spring of 1881 the Goldendale church decided to host another gospel meeting. In the meantime, James A. Garfield was elected 20th President of the United States on November 2, 1880, and the Christian movement received unprecedented publicity. Joseph Warren Downer, an Oregon Christian who had only recently settled in the Goldendale area, attended the Goldendale meeting and sent a report to the *Pacific Christian Messenger* back home in Monmouth, Oregon. He wrote:

The Goldendale protracted meeting, held by Elder J. P. McCorkle, commencing March 5th and ending the 21st with the following result: 11 by confession and 13 by fellowship, total 24.

Bro. McCorkle has done much good, having stirred up the people to thinking and removing prejudice from the minds of many. The plea as set forth by the disciples lost none of its power as set forth by that powerful advocate of the truth, Bro. McCorkle.

He seemed to hold his congregation spellbound, from first to last. It was sad parting on the eve of his last sermon, when the brethren were asked to give Bro. and Sister McCorkle the parting hand; three-fourths, yes near four-fifths of the congregation went forward; many unbelievers gave the parting hand. He has endeared himself greatly to the brethren, and had the best wishes from outsiders.

We are trying to induce him to remain with us this summer, with fair prospects. The doctors have advised him to go to California for his health. He will no doubt go this fall.<sup>21</sup>

Originally from Missouri, John Provines McCorkle had been living and preaching in Northern California for nearly 30 years. He had baptized thousands of converts during his illustrious ministry, and he

was often the Sunday morning preacher when the Christians assembled for their large annual meetings in northern California. The presence in Goldendale of such a veteran preacher gave a tremendous boost to the Christian cause. Although he went home to California that fall, he returned to Goldendale in 1885-86.

One of the sons of Frederick and Emily Eshelman, Jacob Thomas, had shown considerable promise as a young preacher in the late 1870s. Following his marriage in 1880, J. T. Eshelman began preaching more often for both the Centerville and Spring Creek/Goldendale groups. At some point following his 29th birthday, Eshelman accepted a call to preach regularly for both congregations, and he continued this dual ministry for six years.

In his January 27, 1882 letter, M. S. Short had estimated the number of Christians in the county at 120 divided between two congregations. He clearly was talking about Spring Creek/Goldendale and Pleasant Valley and he must not have included the Christians in Centerville in his numbers. This was probably because the Centerville group had not formally organized themselves as a church at that time. In round figures, it appears from Short's letter that there were about 70 members in the Spring Creek/Goldendale congregation and about 50 members in the Pleasant Valley congregation.

Meanwhile, the group of Christians meeting in Centerville was thinking of organizing themselves into a church. They had probably been meeting regularly for worship in the school house as far back as 1877, but they did not organize themselves into a church until January, 1884. In that same year, the Church of Christ at Centerville constructed a frame church building with a prominent spire. Today, 125 years later, it remains standing at its original location and is still used by the Church of Christ.

The annual summer camp-meetings continued to be hosted by the Goldendale Christian Church in the 1880s. In June 1886 a Christian preacher from Columbia County, Thomas McBride Morgan, was invited to preach. Morgan had preached in Oregon from 1874 to 1882 before moving to eastern Washington. In his report submitted to the *American Christian Review*, Morgan observed:

The audiences in the main were good, and the brethren seem to be in peace and harmony, and a nobler band of brethren I never met with. The meeting closed on Lord's day night, May 30, with good interest. There was not a big ingathering, but certainly much

good was done . . . I find among these brethren quite a number of subscribers to and warm friends of the "Old Reliable."<sup>22</sup>

When Morgan used the phrase "Old Reliable," he was referring to the *American Christian Review* which was often called that by its friends and supporters who appreciated its consistently conservative and middle-of-the-road position in the church.

Two months after the Goldendale camp-meeting, Short sent a brief note to the *Christian Standard* in Cincinnati, Ohio on July 23, 1886. He wrote: "We had a good meeting the second Lord's day in this month. Two sermons by Elder J. T. Eshelman and fourteen came forward and made the good confession. Ten of them were immersed on the same day."<sup>23</sup>

Several church papers circulated among the Christians in Klickitat County in the mid 1880s. In addition to the *American Christian Review*, *Christian Standard*, and *Christian Leader*, all of which were published in Cincinnati, Ohio, the *Christian Oracle* from Des Moines, Iowa, the *Christian-Evangelist* from St. Louis, Missouri, and the *Christian Herald* from Monmouth, Oregon were well-represented in the county.

In a letter to the *Christian Leader*, dated September 4, 1887, Joseph E. Beeks from the Pleasant Valley Church wrote: "We now have a Bible class here, and intend to conduct it on the Lord's plan, without the aid of human ordinances."<sup>24</sup> One of the controversial "innovations" at that time was the use of Bible School quarterlies and other "lesson leaves" to aid teachers and students in their Sunday school classes. Joseph Beeks, and others like him, were skeptical of "human" commentaries on the Bible, and preferred the combination of open Bibles, animated discussions and common sense.

After six years of fruitful ministry with Centerville and Goldendale, as well as occasional visits to Pleasant Valley, J. T. Eshelman left the county in November, 1887, and began a new ministry with the Christian Church in North Yakima. In a note to the *Christian Standard* he wrote: "Our six years' labor in and for the churches at Goldendale and Centerville closed the second Lord's day in November, at which meeting we report 4 confessions and baptisms."<sup>25</sup>

The town of Bickleton was founded in April, 1879, and the town of Cleveland, four and a half miles to the west, was founded in 1880. Several families of Christians settled in these areas, but a church was not organized until the early 1890s.

By the decade of the 1880s the American Christian Missionary Society, often referred to as the General Christian Missionary Convention, was exercising tremendous influence in the Christian movement. This was happening not only through the actions of the national board, but in a more pervasive way through the various state conventions and state boards. It was inevitable that the national board would eventually turn its eyes toward the growing population in the Northwest, and this happened in 1887. In that year the ACMS began its operations in the Northwest by providing and supporting preachers for Seattle and Tacoma and several smaller communities.

The Christian movement in Washington Territory underwent a dramatic change with the arrival of Freeman Walden in 1888 and William Franklin Cowden in 1889. Both men were talented preachers and gifted organizers, and in a very short time their shaping influence was being felt throughout the territory. Freeman Walden had served on the state board of the missionary society in Iowa for sixteen years, and from the moment he set foot in the territory in January, 1888 he began calling for the creation of a missionary society in Washington. His efforts were largely successful, and the eager delegates met in Ellensburg on October 4, 1888 and organized the Washington Christian Missionary Convention with Freeman Walden as the first president.

With demands of statehood for Washington increasing on all fronts, the national board of the ACMS did not want to be left behind. In 1889, moving quickly to secure its own presence in the Northwest, the American Christian Missionary Society appointed W. F. Cowden to be "General Superintendent of Missions for the Pacific Northwest" with his salary guaranteed by the Honorable T. W. Phillips of New Castle, Pennsylvania.

On November 11, 1889, Washington territory became Washington state. With Walden and Cowden working in tandem, a significant number of preachers were recruited for service in the newest state in the union. When they arrived in Washington they were indebted to either the American Christian Missionary Society or the Washington Christian Missionary Convention for their new positions. But it wasn't just the preachers who were interested in the newest state. Large numbers of Christians began migrating to the Northwest. By the early 1890s, Walden and Cowden were trumpeting the news that the Christians were the second largest Protestant group (after the Methodists) in Washington.

Walden and Cowden were aided tremendously in their considerable efforts to showcase Washington by a weekly periodical called the *Christian Oracle*. Begun in 1884 and published in Des Moines, Iowa, the *Christian Oracle* was thoroughly supportive of the ACMS and all state missionary conventions. Walden had a regular column in the *Christian Oracle* entitled "Notes of Travel" and later "Washington Notes" in which he described the weather, geography, agricultural crops, and church life in his new home. He often mentioned the names of Christians he met in his travels through the state. His lively column, read by hundreds and perhaps thousands, was certainly a motivating factor in persuading many Christians to leave Iowa and other Midwestern states in favor of carving out a new home and a new life in the Northwest.

Following the creation of the Washington Christian Missionary Convention in 1888, there were not many churches that chose to retain an independent position relative to the state missionary board. The first Territorial evangelist chosen by Walden and the board was C. F. Goode from Wakefield, Nebraska. He accepted their offer and moved to Washington immediately, beginning his labors in November 1888. For his first evangelistic foray into Washington Territory, Goode chose Klickitat County. J. T. Eshelman had been gone for a year, and his former churches at Centerville and Goldendale had not replaced him. C. F. Goode spent a month working with the Church of Christ at Centerville, or as Walden described it in his weekly article: "Bro. Goode, our Territorial evangelist, is in that county working it up, with a view to locating a preacher."<sup>26</sup>

Walden was certainly pleased that both the Washington Christian Missionary Convention and the Territorial evangelist were now a reality, and he wrote with obvious pride in his weekly column:

Bro. Goode is doing excellent work as Territorial evangelist. I am in receipt of a letter from one of the leading members at Centerville, where Bro. Goode spent a month, and in this way I learn that his work is very satisfactory. There were but three additions, all by confession and baptism, but the church was aroused to greater activity, and their spiritual strength was revived. If Bro. Goode succeeds in raising the tone of spirituality among our churches where he goes he will do a good work.<sup>27</sup>

Two weeks later, Walden offered more information on Klickitat. "Bro. Goode has just returned from Klickitat County where he has spent six weeks arranging so as to locate a preacher there," he wrote. "The field

is all ready, and we are now looking for a suitable man. The brethren will not only support a man, but will help him to secure a home. Here is a fine opening for some good preacher. The brethren want a man of some experience and one who will go there to stay."<sup>28</sup>

One week later, C. F. Goode submitted his own report to the *Christian Oracle*. Under the heading of "Washington Territory" he wrote:

I have just returned from Klickitat County. We have in that county not less than 175 disciples. At Centerville and Goldendale (county seat), and at Pleasant Valley they are organized. Centerville and Goldendale are ready for a preacher. They want and deserve a good able man, and will give him a reasonable salary.

There are fine opportunities in that county for the right man—I mean a talented, energetic, godly man—one who has no time nor disposition to growl at Sunday-schools, missionary societies, organs etc. . . .<sup>29</sup>

In retrospect, this is a significant letter. As Goode knew only too well, there was a level of uncomfotableness in the church over all three of these issues. Sunday schools had been introduced into Washington churches in the mid to late 1870s. For the most part they were accepted as a positive tool for educating both children and adults about the contents of the Bible. However, there was some discontent among older members about the use of man-made study guides.

Organs to aid the singing in the public worship of the church were another recent addition. Not all Christians thought they were an improvement. The state missionary society was less than four months old, and the jury was still out on whether Washington Christians would unanimously accept the authority of this parachurch organization and its state board. Most Christians were naturally disposed to favor the autonomy of each local church. Given all of that, Goode's decision to throw down the gauntlet and challenge anyone who disagreed with him seems both brazen and unwise.

In his work as Territorial evangelist, Goode left Klickitat County and began traveling and preaching through eastern Washington. However, when his wife and small children arrived from Nebraska it was difficult to be away from them. After less than four months of service as Territorial evangelist, Goode made a decision to work full-time with the Christians in Klickitat County. Walden wrote: "Bro. Goode, our Territorial evangelist, has resigned and settled in Klickitat County. He could not well be away from his family. We have not yet filled his place."<sup>30</sup>

Walden traveled to Goldendale at the end of May to support Goode in the annual camp-meeting, where there were "about a dozen additions." On Decoration Day Walden was invited to deliver the featured address and "spoke to the largest audience I have yet addressed in Washington Territory. The number present in the armory was estimated at from 1,000 to 1,500."

However, Walden's visit was marred by his encounter with one of the preachers who had helped to establish the Church of Christ at Centerville. David F. Gilstrap was distributing copies of the *Christian Leader* during the camp-meeting and speaking out against missionary societies and the use of organs in Christian worship. Walden wrote: "The *Leader* has some adherents in these parts and they are antis of the out and out school . . . I had a long talk with this brother and warned him of the sin he is committing, but I presume that it will all amount to nothing so long as the *Leader* advocates such foolish and sinful things."<sup>31</sup>

There was no more mention of Klickitat County in the church papers for the next 6 months, but in his column of January 16, 1890 Walden informed his readers that someone had seen J. T. Eshelman on the train returning from Goldendale where he had gone to settle a dispute. Walden wrote the *Christian Oracle*: "There had been some confusion and strife in the Goldendale Church, but harmony was restored. Bro. Eshelman will do good wherever he goes."<sup>32</sup>

C. F. Goode responded with some embarrassment: "Bro. Walden is wrongly informed. There is not, nor has not been any strife nor confusion in the Goldendale Church since I have been here. The brethren in Centerville, eight miles away from here, had some difficulty last year, but we settled the matter ourselves and I think wisely, too. Am sorry such an explanation is necessary."<sup>33</sup>

In 1891 William Worth Stone, a Christian preacher living in Ellensburg, began editing a monthly periodical called the *Gospel Preacher*. Stone was a conservative and he launched his journal primarily to counteract Freeman Walden and the growing influence of the Washington Christian Missionary Convention. As expected, he found considerable support among conservative Christians in Klickitat County. In fact, David F. Gilstrap agreed to serve as a co-editor of the *Gospel Preacher*, thereby insuring its wide distribution in the county.

Among the first subscribers to the new paper was Wesley Short, a resident of Goldendale and a brother to M. S. Short. In 1893, W. W.

Stone ceased publication of the *Gospel Preacher* and gave his mailing list to the *Primitive Christian* in Wellington, Kansas. In exchange, the editors of that weekly journal asked Stone to contribute a regular page entitled "The Gospel Preacher" which he agreed to do. Stone's page contained news from Churches of Christ in the Northwest. In one issue he included a note from Wesley Short that read: "Brother Stone, I will say, although I have never met you in the flesh, still I hold you as one of God's noble defenders of the pure faith; and I invoke the aid of divine blessings of our heavenly Father upon your efforts to maintain the pure gospel."<sup>34</sup>

In 1891, the majority of Christians in the Centerville and Goldendale churches approved of the work of the Washington Christian Missionary Convention and favored the use of organs and pianos in the public worship assemblies of the church. There were conservatives in both congregations who, although disapproving of these "innovations," nevertheless continued to attend and support the church.

However, in three other districts of Klickitat County there were small congregations of Christians where the conservatives had more representation. These congregations were located at: Bickleton-Cleveland in the northeastern section of the county; at Pleasant Valley, eleven miles east of Goldendale; and at Sand Springs south of the Goodnoe Hills.

In April-May of 1891 the Pleasant Valley and Sand Springs congregations invited a 71-year-old veteran preacher from Missouri and Illinois, Craven Peyton Hollis, to preach in a one-week gospel meeting at each location. Hollis was living at Dayton in Columbia County at the time. Following the meetings, David F. Gilstrap submitted a report to the *Christian Leader*:

On the fourth Lord's day in April, Bro. C. P. Hollis of Dayton, Wash. began a meeting with the little band of brethren worshipping at Sand Springs, Klickitat Co., Wash., continued one week and went to Pleasant Valley and continued one week. The visible results in each case was the strengthening of the faithful brethren and the stirring up of the opposers until, I hope, their investigations will lead them to the truth. This county is sparsely settled and pretty much occupied by innovationists and other sects, so that the hearing for the truth was not as good as was hoped for. Bro. H. is an earnest, fearless, able proclaimer of the gospel as delivered by the apostles of the Son of God. He has a wonderful memory for one so old (he is seventy-two years old this summer), and his exegesis is as good as the best. His style and delivery are

with life and force, but his face is set as steel against innovation and all opposition to the truth, for which cause the opposers have tried to starve him out here in Washington.<sup>35</sup>

On April 30, 1893, David F. Gilstrap sent another letter for publication to the editor of the *Christian Leader*. Writing from Sand Springs, Washington, Gilstrap reported:

Today at our regular Lord's day meeting, after preaching I took the confession of and baptized two noble souls (Bro. and Sister Mobly), which brings our little congregation up to eight in number. Although we are few in number and live in a sparsely settled country where there is but little material to work on to make Christians of, still we are determined by a godly walk, apostolic worship and sound teaching to save ourselves and all honest-hearted people who will listen.<sup>36</sup>

The General Missionary Convention began publishing annual "Year Books" at some point in the 1880s. These volumes contained a wealth of statistical information on Churches of Christ/Christian Churches in every state in the union. Washington may not have been included until after it achieved statehood. The first "Year Book" I have seen that includes Washington is the one dated 1892. In that volume, Washington is credited with 86 churches and 4,812 members (only baptized believers would be included in this figure as the Christians did not baptize infants nor count them in membership totals).

Of the 86 congregations listed, four were located in Klickitat County. Those churches and their membership totals were: Goldendale (60); Centerville (50); Bickleton (40); and Luna (35). Luna was an early name for Pleasant Valley. According to this data, there were 185 Christians distributed in four congregations in the county. The congregation at Sand Springs was not listed, but as Gilstrap pointed out, there were only eight Christians in that group.

A young Kansas preacher, M. J. Walters, came west in the summer of 1893 and preached in several gospel meetings along the way. He was "field editor" for the weekly *Primitive Christian*, and he was zealous in his attempt to secure subscribers in the Western states. In July he traveled through Klickitat County and stopped in the Cleveland area to preach for a week. According to the "Year Book" there was a 40-member congregation meeting in Bickleton, but there was no congregation meeting in Cleveland four miles away.

Writing from this temporary base in Klickitat County, M. J. Walters informed the readers of the *Primitive Christian* that:

We are now in an interesting meeting at Cleveland, Wash. What the end will be, no one can tell. But we hope to do much good in sowing the seed of the kingdom, if we do not get to reap any of the ripened grain.

We have no organization here at this place, but if some good evangelist could come in and locate at some point where he could reach this much neglected spot, there could be a permanent one, as we have a few members scattered about over the country. We will do all we can in holding forth the words of life, to give our hearers something to think about.<sup>37</sup>

After preaching for a week, Walters wrote again on July 25 to report: "Four were added to the church of Christ in a week's meeting at this place—two immersions, one from the Baptists and one reclaimed."<sup>38</sup>

Walters was an effective spokesman for the *Primitive Christian*, and copies were soon circulating among Christians in the county. One church leader who welcomed the new paper was William Dudley Smith, one of the elders of the Centerville Church of Christ. Although Centerville used an organ in worship and supported the missionary society, Smith appreciated the conservative thrust of the *Primitive Christian*. Corresponding with its editor, Smith wrote:

I like the *Primitive Christian* very much and wish I were able to give it financial aid. I hope it may survive these hard times, and surmount all difficulties, and long live to do battle against sin and rebellion, and to be a mighty factor in restoring the ancient order of things. May the blessings of God, our Father, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, rest upon the editor and contributors.<sup>39</sup>

From Pony Short's rejoicing in "the rise and progress of the Christian cause" in Klickitat County in the 1870s to William Dudley Smith's passion for "restoring the ancient order of things" in the 1890s, many of the Christians in isolated and sparsely-populated Klickitat County were faithful to their vision of the kingdom of God.

#### NOTES

1. *Millennial Harbinger* (January 1840) 19. Unearthing quotations from long-forgotten nineteenth-century periodicals may not seem very exciting to modern day descendents of the Restoration Movement, but this is exactly the kind of data

that enthralled Mike Casey. On countless occasions, I was the beneficiary of Mike's encyclopedia knowledge of Christian periodicals. For two decades we worked together to build up the collection of Restoration periodicals in Payson Library at Pepperdine University. Our late night phone calls were never brief. We routinely talked too long because the data was always so enchanting. He was a beloved colleague, and I miss him.

2. Robert Ballou, *Early Klickitat Valley Days* (Goldendale: Klickitat County Historical Society, 1997) 287–88.
3. *An Illustrated History of Klickitat, Yakima and Kittitas Counties* (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing, 1904) 433.
4. Ballou, *Early Klickitat Valley Days*, 287.
5. *Ibid.*, 288.
6. *An Illustrated History*, 433.
7. *American Christian Review* (March 2, 1882) 78.
8. Ballou, *Early Klickitat Valley Days*, 396.
9. See Short's letter of January 27, 1882, published in the *American Christian Review* (March 2, 1882) 78.
10. *An Illustrated History*, 432.
11. Pete May, ed., *History of Klickitat County, Washington* (Goldendale: Klickitat County Historical Society, 1982), 81.
12. Written January 27, 1882, and published in the *American Christian Review* (March 2, 1882).
13. Written July 22, 1879, and published in the *American Christian Review* (August 19, 1879).
14. Written August 4, 1879, and published in the *American Christian Review* (September 9, 1879).
15. Written January 27, 1882, and published in the *American Christian Review* (March 2, 1882).
16. Pete May, 100 *Golden Years: A 1972 Look at the History of Goldendale, Washington, at the End of Its First Century* (Goldendale: The Goldendale Sentinel, 1972) 74, 76.
17. Letter from Wayne Eshelman to Jerry Rushford, January 15, 2000.
18. Written February 3, 1880, and published in the *American Christian Review*, (March 9, 1880).
19. Written January 27, 1882, and published in the *American Christian Review* (March 2, 1882).
20. Written July 5, 1880, and published in the *Pacific Christian Messenger* (July 16, 1880). J. W. Elder was a young preacher who had just graduated from Christian College in Santa Rosa, California. Dr. D. P. Hewitt lived in Pleasant Valley. David F. Gilstrap was a young preacher who had just settled in Klickitat County. He would remain there for two decades. Jacob Thomas Eshelman had been in the county for about three years. He would begin a six-year ministry with the Goldendale and Centerville congregations in the summer or fall of 1881. Rufus H. Moss was the son of a well-known gospel preacher, Jesse Jasper Moss. Rufus had fought in the Civil War and returned nearly blind. He preached in Oregon throughout the 1870s but was moving into Washington Territory about the time of this gospel meeting in Goldendale.
21. Written on March 26, 1881 and published in the *Pacific Christian Messenger* (April 1, 1881).

22. Written in June 1886 and published in the *American Christian Review* (July 1, 1886).
23. Written July 23, 1886 and published in the *Christian Standard* (August 14, 1886).
24. Written September 4, 1887 and published in the *Christian Standard* (September 20, 1887).
25. Written November 21, 1887 and published in the *Christian Standard* (December 13, 1887).
26. *Christian Oracle* (January 3, 1889) 14.
27. Ibid.
28. *Christian Oracle* (January 17, 1889) 7.
29. *Christian Oracle* (January 24, 1889) 14.
30. *Christian Oracle* (March 21, 1889) 7.
31. *Christian Oracle* (June 13, 1889) 14.
32. *Christian Oracle* (January 16, 1890) 14.
33. *Christian Oracle* (February 13, 1890) 7.
34. *Primitive Christian* (February 15, 1894) 6.
35. *Christian Leader* (June 23, 1891).
36. *Christian Leader* (May 16, 1893) 3.
37. *Primitive Christian* (August 3, 1893) 5.
38. Ibid., 4.
39. *Primitive Christian* (August 9, 1894) 5. The "hard times" Smith referred to was the two-year depression of 1893-94 that gripped the entire nation and led to many bank closings.