

# FRENCHTOWN NEWS

FRENCHTOWN HISTORICAL FOUNDATION



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## 2021 Events

**May 31, 10am-12pm :**  
Celebration of the Flowers

**June 26, 2021, 10-2pm :**  
Saint-Jean Baptiste Day

**Sept 25, 2021, 2-6 pm :**  
Frenchtown Rendezvous

**Renew your membership today!**  
<https://tinyurl.com/FHFmember>

**Make a donation :**  
<https://tinyurl.com/supportfhf>

FIND US ONLINE AT [WWW.FRENCHTOWNWA.ORG](http://WWW.FRENCHTOWNWA.ORG)  
[WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/  
FRENCHTOWNHISTORICALFOUNDATION/](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/FRENCHTOWNHISTORICALFOUNDATION/)

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## The COVID Report

It was a good year to go for a walk outside. This meant that the Frenchtown Historic Site had a record year in terms of local visitors. Our guest book showed an uptick in families and visitors from around the region, and new people are still coming.

It was a bad year to host an event. That means no Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, no Rendezvous, no Cabin Tour, no Living History. No silent auction. No potato bar. In a normal year, Frenchtown raises more than half of its operating budget through the Rendezvous and donations at our events. COVID took that away. Fortunately, we had a rainy-day plan, so we're not *quite* broke—yet.

There's another piece of the puzzle, however. Our membership is down—way down. Why? Like most historical non-profits, our member base consists largely of seniors. We've lost almost all of our founding members in the last few years. We will need to fill in the fund-raising gap created by COVID, but even more importantly, Frenchtown needs a membership campaign, and someone to lead it.



## French Canadian History Conference

It was going to be *amazing*.

In June of 2020, Whitman College and the Frenchtown Historical Foundation were planning a conference on the history of French Canadian migration to the Pacific Northwest. A hundred people were planning to come. We'd created an exhibit

for the Maxey Museum on the history of Frenchtown, and invited speakers from all over Canada.

The conference dream was to connect the whole PNW community of people interested in the history of French Canadian and Métis in the West. We wanted to bring together all the people—regional archivists, museum directors, genealogists, public school teachers, family historians, descendants and amateur historians, and university researchers. We planned displays and oral history sessions. There was going to be a film maker doing interviews. A barbecue and jam session. Probably cookies as well.

It takes a special convergence of people and resources, to organize a conference. This one was cancelled because of the pandemic. We'll let you know if it ever looks like we can try again.



## Memorial Day Flower Tour

This year FHF celebrated Memorial Day and the history of the Frenchtown cemetery with informal presentations of the plant restoration project. A barrel of parasols welcomed visitors to the cemetery, along with abundant blooms of lacy phacelia, blue flax, blanket flower, Rocky Mountain penstemon, and the occasional shy lupine. Ratibida, or prairie coneflower, will be next to bloom in June.

In May, early morning is the best time to visit the Frenchtown cemetery. Blue Flax has spread in great banks of flowers all around the monument circle. Flax blooms one flower per stem per day for over a month. The petals fall each day with the heat, so you'll want to go early for the best show. If your timing is off, you can still look for the lovely blue "snow" of petals on the ground under each plant.

Some of the flowering plants in the cemetery are not native species, but do respect the needs of the site through their drought-tolerant hardiness. Pink yarrow is a good example—while the white and yellow varieties are native to the inland Northwest, their pink cousin is an interloper, brought in for its lovely fuschia color. Bearded iris, native to Europe, first came to North America in the 17th century, and would plausibly have been planted by early settlers.

Visitors were also introduced to native grass species at the site, including Great Basin Rye, Snake River Wheatgrass, and Indian Rice grass. Unlike turf grass, these hardy, drought-tolerant plants grow only from seed, not runners, and mowing them during the growing season can kill the plant. Wait until fall if you want to trim, and leave the clippings—dormant season mowing lays down a layer of weed-suppressing mulch and conserves moisture for aggressive growth in early spring.

Flowers have their own way of telling stories. Frenchtown oral history tells that women would carry water from the river to keep the plants alive and beautify the cemetery. Before Frenchtown, this area was known by its Cayuse name, Páşxapa, or "Place of the balsam root sunflower". Planting native flowers in the Frenchtown cemetery allows us to honor that history at the same time as we celebrate the memory of the people buried there.



Photo by Margie Benson



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# Obituaries

## Leontine "Jo" Winn, 1923-2021

Leontine "Jo" Winn, longtime supporter of Frenchtown, was living proof that French and French Canadian overlapped in early Walla Walla. Jo was born Feb 14, 1923 to Louis and Louise



Jaussaud. Her grandmother DeMerise Noel came to Walla Walla from Quebec in the 1880s, where she married French sheepherder Leon Jaussaud in 1892.

Jo grew up on a dairy and sheep ranches in Washtucna, and Wallula, and lived all over the United States with her Marine Corps

husband Doug Winn. Jo and Doug moved back to Walla Walla in 1971, where Jo was active with the Historical Society, PEO, DAR, YWCA, and president of the ladies Board of the WW Country Club, as well as the Board of the Fort Walla Walla Museum.

One of Jo's favorite stories of her French Canadian grandmother was about being dropped off Sunday afternoons at the house on west Alder, in the middle of a neighborhood that was also known as "French town". Jo's grandmother would take her along to see her "French lady friends" and Jo was expected to sit quietly and listen while they visited in French.

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## Kathleen McCaw Bergevin, 1923-2021



Kathleen McCaw Bergevin grew up on the family wheat ranch near Prescott, WA, and attended Prescott schools where she met her future husband, Russell Bergevin. She attended WSC in Pullman, WA and graduated with High Honors. Kathleen was someone who threw herself into whatever needed to be done, whether helping with the ranch operation, cooking for the ranch and the family, keeping the books, helping her children with their many activities, or planning family events.

Described by her family as a "rather introverted soul", Kathleen was nonetheless a tremendously active member of the Frenchtown community. She was a founding member of the Frenchtown Recreation group in 1946. She taught Home Ec in Pullman and Touchet, and FEAST classes at Wa-Hi. She was a 4-H leader, active in the Chamber of Commerce, and a volunteer at Hospice and Kirkman House. Kathleen also portrayed her great aunt Mary Erwin in the Fort Walla Walla Living History series and was a founding member of the Frenchtown Historical Foundation.

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## Nadine Mae Munns-Gerkey, 1927-2020

Nadine Mae Munns Gerkey was the great granddaughter of Damase and Mary Parmela Bergevin. She grew up in the wheat fields near Prescott, and returned there to farm with husband Gene Gerkey



after their marriage in 1952. She loved farm and family life on the Touchet river—the horses and cows, working in the garden, and baking awesome pies. She and Gene lived on the ranch for 65 years, until Gene's death in 2018.

Nadine was always on the go. She worked in local journalism as both teacher and reporter for much of her life, beginning with a job as the first woman "hard news" reporter for the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin in 1949. For thirty years, she covered civic news and personal profiles for the entire Touchet valley, including Pomeroy, Starbuck, Dayton, Waitsburg

and Prescott. She served as the first journalism instructor for the new Walla Walla Community College.

Nadine retired from the UB only to launch the quarterly "Prescott Eagle", for which she was reporter, writer, editor, and publisher in one. Husband Gene helped with subscriptions and home delivery.

Nadine served on the Dayton Depot board, the Frenchtown Historical Foundation, the committee to build the Veteran's Memorial Wall at WSU and a 10 year historic preservation advocacy to preserve the old St Patrick's High School. She was a member of Delta Gamma Sorority, Junior Club of Walla Walla, and Assumption Catholic Church. Alzheimer's cast its shadow over the end of her life, but it never dimmed her warm smile.

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## Charles Francis "Butch" Sams Jr., 1947-2019



Butch was Walla Walla, Cayuse and Yankton Sioux, but he loved to tell a story about the time his métis grandmother, upset at his parents for running away to get married, chewed out

his dad and called him "that horny little Frenchman."

Butch earned his associate's degree at Haskell University in Lawrence, Kansas and played college football. He served in the U.S.

Army with the 999th Signal Company in Japan from 1967-1969 and worked for over 30 years as a journeyman lineman with the power company.

Butch was like a directory of family history—he knew people and their stories on and off every reservation in the West. He loved to fish, hunt and camp in the Blue Mountains. He loved football, basketball, and baseball, and coached hundreds of youth both on the Reservation and in Pendleton.

# Why We Love Goats

Every year, we've battled the weeds. We've sprayed and mowed and gathered and burned, with little positive impact, more than a few sore volunteer backs, and the expense of many hard-raised dollars. The kochia and Russian thistle seemed insurmountable.

Then Billy's Goats came to town in August of 2020.

Targeted grazing is the practice of using herbivores instead of spray to clear unwanted vegetation. Goat herders use portable electric fencing to concentrate the goats in a small area for a short amount of time—in this case, 472 animals munched down the Frenchtown weeds in 1-2 acre chunks per day for over a week.



Timing is key. Bring the goats in too soon, and they'll eat the green bunchgrass before it's had a chance to drop its seed, and the young kochia will just grow back. Bring them too late, and all the kochia seed is already on the ground, just waiting for the next year. August is just right.



Volunteers burning kochia and thistle in 2019.



What a difference a goat can make!  
The goats have eaten the leaves and seed, leaving only the stems.

**If we can get the timing right three years in a row, we might just win this battle.** Kochia likes bare ground and poor soil. It doesn't do well in a thriving stand of grass. Wherever the goats grazed last summer, the kochia is greatly reduced and the grass is filling in.

All it takes is money. It's going to cost \$5-7,000 per year for three more years to do this.

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# The State of the Foundation

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This letter goes out to people directly connected to the Frenchtown Historical Foundation by ancestry and by effort, to let you know a little more frankly where we stand. This letter is going out to people who might feel angry or betrayed if Frenchtown ceased to be.

COVID made more visible a truth that was already staring us in the face. The Frenchtown board consists of 10 people. Only one is under the age of 70. The officers have not changed in six years—no one will take their place.

Our membership has gone from over 200 to fewer than 50 people. We have lost founding members of the organization, people who built it up and made it possible through their drive and dedication. These people have not been replaced; are not replaceable.

This particular board has finished the cabin restoration, transformed the cemetery, and planted and irrigated trees and flowers. We have volunteered thousands of hours. We have written and received local and state level grants, and raised money through membership and events.

This board is tired. Our families are tired. Our friends are tired, and there are no new people to ask for help, because our board membership hasn't changed. Healthy non-profits depend upon a renewable and rotating cycle of officers, each bringing new skills, connections, and volunteers to their work for the organization.

There was a time when the Frenchtown Historical foundation went through a period of deep and angry division. The community got wind of it, and wanted nothing to do with

that kind of poison. But it hasn't been like that in a long time. We get along. We're kind to each other. We need each other—there's no one else but us to do this work.

But time is running out on this board. Health is running out. The money has not run out yet, but without new members it will, in the not too distant future. We are working on a plan for what will happen if it does, or if there are simply not enough people left to do the work. Responsible people make wills; responsible foundations make dissolution plans. It is a terrifyingly real possibility.

There's no point in threatening people to get them to help a project. This letter isn't meant to be a threat. It's meant to be fair warning, a last chance, a plea—because we really have done our best, and we really are near the end of our collective rope. And we've accomplished so much. The Little Engine That Could has nothing on this board.

So. Would it matter to you if the Frenchtown Historical Foundation ceased to exist? Would it matter enough to donate? Would it matter enough that you would campaign for donations? Would it matter enough to join the board?

We're asking today for money. But money alone won't save us. Only people can do that.

So if you or someone you know is interested in the work of historical preservation, habitat restoration, and community education, please reach out to a Frenchtown board member today.



# What Should We Do About the Posters?

If you've been to the site recently, you've probably noticed. Our posters are in rough shape.

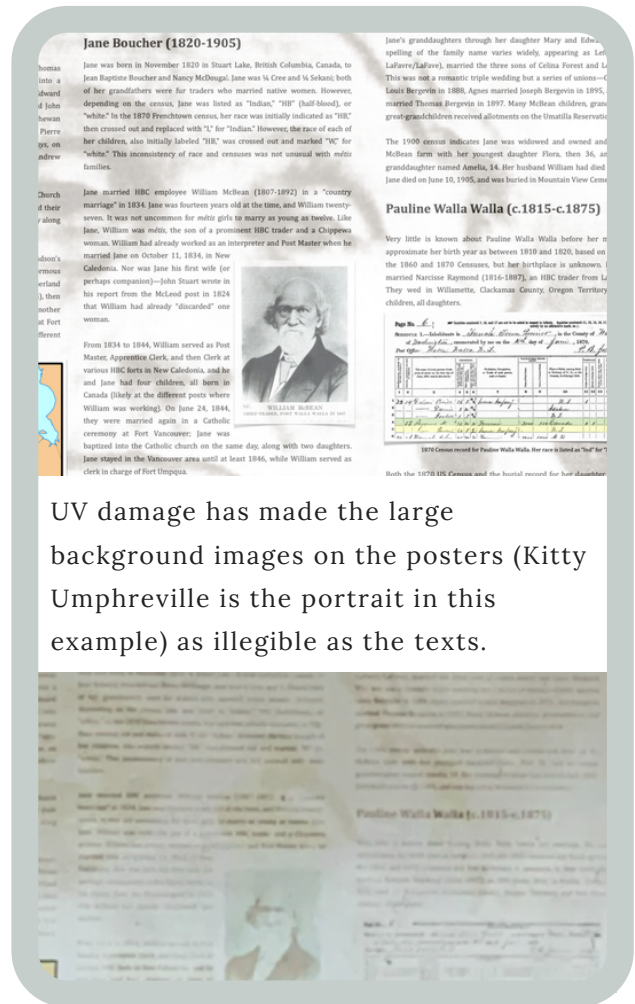
Most of them were printed four years ago, and then laminated with a UV shield. They looked good for the first year, OK for the second year, and then... well. The text is mostly legible, but the pictures (the best part, really) are nearly illegible.

The poster project started out in 2016 with the goal of discovering and telling the stories of the early Frenchtown women. Previous versions of the Frenchtown story emphasized the biographies of the men, and the history of the battle. That seemed like only part of the story.

Now, we need to figure out how to replace the laminated biography posters, at \$200 each, or else find new ways to share this information. The website is a good way to share large volumes of information, but the visitors to the Frenchtown Historic site want both. They want to be able to dig deeper, and they want to be able to read something on the spot, right then and there.

This problem is also an opportunity. Our research on the roles of the women crowded out the pieces we had on display before. Maybe now is a good time to bring those back and even make room for new work.

We're considering a Rogue's Gallery approach. This is not entirely without foundation in historical fact—some of the Frenchtown fellows were definitely a bit roguish. But what we're thinking about is a biographical gallery, where short texts, hopefully with images, link to longer versions on our website.



UV damage has made the large background images on the posters (Kitty Umphreville is the portrait in this example) as illegible as the texts.

The poster information is already compiled, and board member Judy Fortney has already leveraged her genealogical work to post even more information to Facebook. An enterprising soul or souls could use that as the starting point for an entire series of small posters (cheaper to print and replace), each linked to the website through a QR code you can read with your phone.

Cost is a factor. But we also need a volunteer, someone interested in history who likes to write and edit and can do the formatting. If this person might be you, please contact Sarah Hurlburt, [hurlbuse@whitman.edu](mailto:hurlbuse@whitman.edu), or Judy Fortney, [judithfortney@gmail.com](mailto:judithfortney@gmail.com).



# The Imaginary Silent Auction

Since we didn't have a Rendezvous in 2020, we also didn't have a silent auction. That's probably just as well—COVID was hard on everyone, and our vendor supporters didn't need more people knocking on their doors asking for donations. But most of these vendors have supported us for years, and so we thought this would be a good time to say "Thank you!" If you're in the neighborhood, give them some business and thank them for supporting Frenchtown!

## Wineries:

Bergevin Lane  
Buty  
Cavu Cellars  
Cayuse  
College Cellars  
Dumas Station  
Dunham Cellars  
Glencorie  
Gramercy  
Grantwood  
Isenhower  
L'Ecole 41  
Long Shadows  
Pambrun  
Reininger  
Seven Hills  
Spofford Station  
Spring Valley  
Three Rivers  
Waterbrook  
Windy Canyon  
Woodward Canyon

## Restaurants:

Big Cheese Pizza  
Blue Palm  
Bright's Candies  
Clarette's  
Coffee Perk  
Colville Patisserie

## Restaurants (cont.)

D'Olivio  
Dingle's of Dayton  
Dutch Brothers Coffee  
Graze  
Maple Counter  
Starbucks  
Stone Soup

## Goods and Services :

Bicycle Barn  
Book and Game  
Cut it Again Sams  
Don Johnson Trailer sales  
Ellen's Cutting Edge  
Farmer's Co-op  
Gail Davis  
Inland Family Dental  
Inland Octopus  
Nancy's Dream Garden  
Nonie's Sewing and Alterations  
Saager's Shoes  
The New York Store  
Three Divas Beading  
Wine Valley Golf Club

## Places to Visit:

Fort Walla Walla Museum  
Harper Joy Theater  
Kirkman House  
Tamástslíkt Cultural Institute

Our thanks to Susan Monahan, Mark Brucks and the Blue Mountain Community Foundation ! Their \$500 donation to the Frenchtown Historical Foundation through BMCF was matched by All In Washington's program for COVID relief.



**Make a donation today!**

<https://tinyurl.com/supportfhf>





## Flood!

Lots of places in the valley got flooded in 2020, including Frenchtown. But our high waters came from a slightly different source. On June 29, 2020, an irrigation malfunction north of the highway sent six inches of water through the culvert and onto the Frenchtown site.

Ross Osborn and Whitman student intern River Taylor worked to divert the water away from the shelter. Norm and Sue Osterman sounded the alarm and fetched sandwiches and shovels for the crew. Although the water came all the way up to and around the shelter, thanks to Ross and River (and the quick-thinking visitors who phoned it in!) the storage area stayed dry.

## Trees

In 2018 volunteers planted trees along the eastern boundary of the site, and next to the cabin and shelter. The cottonwood shade we enjoy next to the shelter today was planted at that time.

Nearly half of those first trees encountered fatal difficulties. They were girdled by rodents, water-starved when the irrigation line broke, and a few might have had an unfortunate encounter with an escaped goat.

On March 21, 2021, thanks to board members, neighbor John Miller, John and Sharon Richter, and volunteers from Life Church, we planted Serviceberry, Sagebrush, Ponderosa Pine, Cottonwood, Bitterbrush, and Elderberry to replace the lost trees.

Ross Osborn got the irrigation going again, and we're looking forward to the shade and habitat these plants will bring!



## Meet the Board

### Frenchtown Historical Foundation



**Richard Monacelli**  
President  
509-607-2721  
richnan@charter.net



**Mari Sams Tester**  
Vice President  
509-525-9428



**Judith Fortney**  
Treasurer  
509-529-8210  
judithfortney@gmail.com



**Sarah Hurlburt**  
Secretary  
509-540-4398  
hurlbuse@whitman.edu



**Ross Osborn**  
If we were a national park, Ross would be our Ranger.



**Margie Get-it-Done Benson**  
Potato bar master  
Enemy of the weed.



**Elaine MacDonald**  
We tried to steal her from Fort Walla Walla, but had to settle for sharing.



**Dorothy Gagnon Hall**  
Founding member



**Charles Saranto**  
Living History Player  
History lover  
Mower master



**Mary-Anne O'Neil**  
Why yes, I can help write that grant.



### We have T-shirts for sale!

We worked with local artist Jeanne McMenemy to create a logo, and with local printer Cindy Epifanio to create these soft, sturdy shirts. You can buy shirts at our events or use the code on the right to order on our website.





## **Frenchtown Historical Foundation**

PO Box 1224

Walla Walla WA 99362

FRENCHTOWNWA.ORG.

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ FRENCHTOWNHISTORICALFOUNDATION/

### **2021 Events**

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**Sept 25, 2021, 2-6 pm** : Frenchtown Rendezvous

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#### **Renew or join today!**

<https://tinyurl.com/FHFmember>

or send your name, address, email,  
tel.# and membership fee to:

Frenchtown Historical Foundation  
PO Box 1224  
Walla Walla WA 99362



#### **Member categories :**

Individual: \$25  
Couple: \$35  
Family: \$45  
Advocate: \$100  
Sustainer: \$250  
Patron: \$500  
Sponsor: \$1000  
Benefactor: \$5000