

Early History of the State College of Washington.

By Judge Thos. Neill.

Before the bill establishing the Agricultural College and School of Science had been signed a telegram was sent to the governor to the effect that Pullman was in the center of the richest and best agricultural lands in the state, had an equable climate and was the only place in the state that had an abundance of pure artesian water, and that the citizens would give to the state 160 acres of land if the Agricultural College and School of Science were located here. This telegram was published in the papers of the state and commented on, and it caused other localities to realize that there was a prize to be given by the state that was worth striving for. When that telegram was sent none here believed that it would be possible for a village of about 300 inhabitants to secure the institution; but it was considered that it would at least call attention to the fact that there was in the state a place called Pullman.

When the commissioners that were to locate the institution came to Pullman, word was sent to the farmers for miles around to come to town and hitch their teams in a conspicuous place, to show that Pullman was a trade center and a place of importance, and it is safe to say that on that day the town presented a business activity never seen here before or since. The commissioners were loyally entertained, but when they met to decide on the location the member of the commission who lived in Colfax voted for Colfax, the North Yakima member voted for North Yakima and the west side member voted for Spokane. None would yield, and after a time they agreed to report to the governor that they could not agree.

At the following session of the legislature a new bill was introduced and passed, providing for the appointment of three commissioners on location and providing that the institution should be located east of the mountains, and in a county that did not have some other state institution, and that the members of the commission should be residents of the west side of the state. These provisions were inserted on the suggestion of Pullman, so as to cut out Spokane and Walla Walla and leave the matter practically between Whitman and Yakima counties. We figured that by doing this we could get the support of Walla Walla and Spokane, which we did.

The commissioners again visited the several localities and met in Olympia to make their decision. They were in session about a week. About eleven o'clock on Saturday night the Pullman committee was asked to submit its bond for deed for the land proposed to be given to the state. The committee then discovered that it did not have with it a correct description of all the land, but were able to give from memory the description of the tract that was to constitute the farm, and also the tract that was to constitute the campus; but between these two tracts there was a space which could not be described, so to meet this a strip 200 feet wide connecting the two tracts was inserted in the bond. That is why originally there was a 200-foot boulevard from the campus to the farm.

A few minutes before midnight the decision was made and filed with the secretary of state locating the institution at Pullman. We thought the fight had ended, but soon realized that it had only fairly commenced. The regents met to consider a plan for a building. The one proposed was a building 150 feet long, 50 feet wide and three stories high, which was supposed to be ample to meet all the future needs of the institution, and it was to be built in sections, as the institution grew and required more room. The regents arrived in Pullman about six o'clock in the evening, intending to meet the following morning. About the time the regents arrived we received information that the sheriff was on his way from Colfax with papers to serve on the regents, enjoining them from letting any contract for buildings or doing anything until the further order of the court. A hasty consultation was held, with the result that the regents were taken from the supper table and inside of five minutes the plans were drawn and accepted, the contract let and bonds given for the construction of the building known as the "Crib."

The Superior Court of Pierce county, in which the action was commenced, decreed that the regents be perpetually enjoined, from which an appeal was taken to the Supreme Court, and this court decided in favor of the regents and dismissed the case. Other suits were started and the progress of the institution delayed until the legislature met and another fight was necessary.