

An Unhidden Treasure

What & Where is White Spring Ranch?

By Diane Conroy

My grandfather lived with us when I was 6 years old. He used to tell us the story of his father, John Lorang, in Genesee, Idaho. We were living in Portland, growing up in a Mid-Century Modern home with lots of children. There were 7 children and 2 parents in our house in 1962 when Grandma Blanche passed away. My parents soon decided to also take in my Grandfather Barney Lorang, when he became lonely on his own without his wife Blanche. Grandpa lived with us for 3 years, telling us stories and playing with the children. The look on my Grandfather's face, when he talked about his "Papa's Ranch" was a look of awe, of amazement; that strongly impressed me even as a 6 year old. He would tell me that his father would grow saplings in the woods, shaping them into canes and chairs as they grew. It was like a fairy story to this little girl, but Grandpa's face said it was real.

Well, I grew up, fell in love and married. My husband was also interested in History and encouraged me when he heard about the Ranch. I became interested in Genealogy and researched our family tree extensively. So much so, that I heard that Janet Lorang, who now lived on the Ranch, might like to hear the stories I had found. Next thing I knew my cousin Judy Litchfield and I were making a trip to Genesee, Idaho, to share the stories. It was now 2003.

Janet Lorang was very interested in the family history that I had found. In the middle of the conversation, she stood up and pulled out a newspaper article about a local National Historical site. Could we do this also? she asked. I didn't need much convincing. I asked Janet if I could look in the locked up Log cabin.

Opening the old wooden door to the cabin, I could see a little bit through the darkness and dust and began to realize that these stacks of old newspapers were from WWI. The battles of WWII were playing out in another four stacks of papers. An old book, "The History of Idaho" 1918 was lying face down on the floor and covered in dust. It was hard to move around the log cabin; it was so full of magazines and books. A WWI uniform was hanging on a hook. Sitting on a shelf was a pile of 100 year old sheet music with my Grandma Blanche's name on them. These were early enough to be from the time my grandparents were courting. Her maiden name on the music read "Blanche Morgan". These were next to a WWI German helmet. The cabin itself was incredible. Hand hewn logs and the original 1876 roofing surrounded this collection.

I then moved to the next cabin which had been a roadside Natural Science Curio museum in 1913. My great Grandfather John had opened his own museum, with cards and flyers, over 100 years ago. The shelves were full of everything imaginable. Large bull moose antlers were above the antique fireplace hearth on the far wall, with purses and seed pod necklaces hanging on it. Some strings were WWI campaign hat cords. The shelf under the moose antlers held 1920's Tarzan series books by Edgar Rice Burroughs and a Native American mortar and pestle.

There was no hope for me now. I felt strongly that someone needed to find out what was here. The Curio cabin also had a lean-to, which had been built onto it later. I was told that this lean-to was built to house all of the papers and items from Henry Lorang's bedroom when he had moved out of the farmhouse. Henry was John's son, my Grandpa's brother and had been the next generation to live with his family in the Historical farm home.

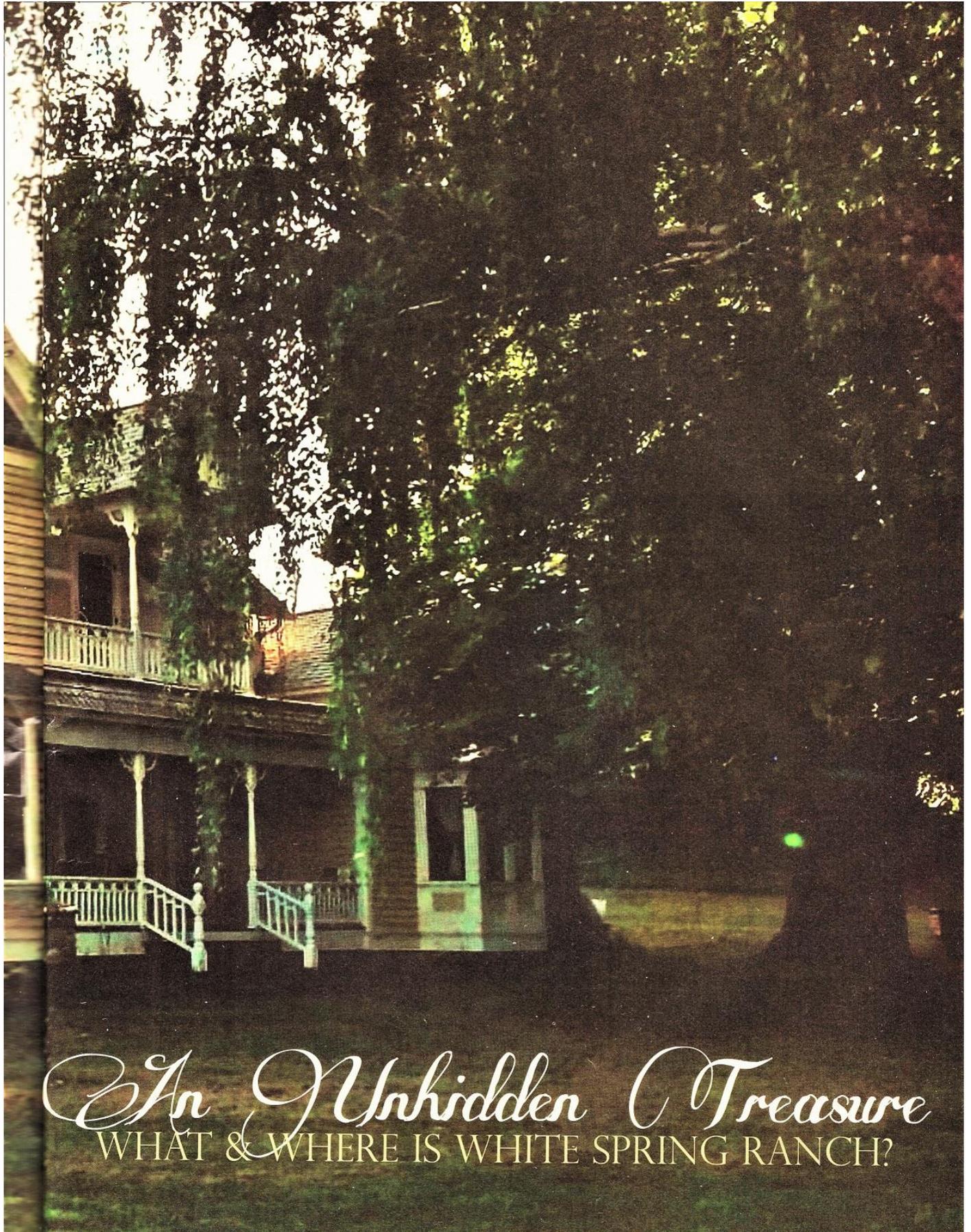
In the lean-to to the Curio cabin, I found several old wooden cigar boxes and in opening these one by one, I was introduced to an incredible collection of photographs, all over 100 years old; taken by my great Grandfather John. I had never met John Lorang. Grandpa had mentioned several other hobbies that his father worked on, but I did not know photography was one of them.

I eventually moved to the Ranch in 2008 and set to excavating the enormous collection stored in the 1876 Log cabin, 1880's Curio Museum cabin and 1873-1904 original farmhouse. As the early Simon & Garfunkel song, "The Boxer" goes, "I left my home and my family" (My husband and my brothers and sisters, still need therapy for this; another story). After digging in dozens of cardboard boxes, cigar boxes and all kinds of containers; I began to wonder what we could create from the collections on the Ranch. There were so many journals and photographs, I thought a wonderful way to introduce the museum we were starting to build was to create books for local libraries and the public. Christmas was coming, maybe a Christmas book would be beautiful.

I had also found vintage newspapers, including the "**Genesee News**" as far back as 1898. In gathering these papers, I realized that several of the front pages had letters written from Genesee soldiers to the newspaper, from WWI to WWII and up until the Vietnam War. I contacted Idaho Humanities Council for a grant to create self-printed books and with the assistance of student volunteers from WSU and UIdaho, we gathered articles and photographs to create several of these books. So far the list includes "**The Story of White Spring Ranch**", "**Martha Lorang's Journal**, stories of growing up at the Ranch in the early 1900's" and the "**Legacy of John Lorang**" an illustrated directed study which had been written by a U of Idaho student, Kurtis Zenner in 1986, "**Genesee Soldiers, WWI and WWII**", "**Genesee Soldiers, Korea and Vietnam**", "**Genesee Pioneers**", "**The Great Depression, Genesee**", "**Younger People's Contribution to History**", "**Women's History**" and "**Children at the Ranch**". Most of these are available at the Moscow and Genesee libraries, or through interlibrary loan. There are also copies here at the Museum. We hope to continue restoration and excavation of this site and continue to work with students throughout the school year. Idaho Heritage Trust grants and extremely talented family members are helping us restore the buildings. We have yet to create the Christmas book I had set out to do, but that should be coming soon.

White Spring Ranch is open Sundays and Tuesdays 1 p.m. to Sunset, year around or anytime by appt. at 208.416.1006. We also hold annual events, such the Little House Day every September and a Christmas Open House. For more information see our Facebook page at White Spring Ranch Museum/Archive Library Non-Profit.

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