

# Museum of North Idaho

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*Logging camp c. 1910. Anderson Photography Studio, St. Maries. Log-6-104*

## Unions in the Timber Industry 1917 to 1947

By Kay Grant Powers and Dorothy Dahlgren

### THE "LUMBERJACK"

The lumberjack had to do many jobs. He worked in the woods with a partner sawing 1,500 board feet of timber a day with a "Swede Fiddle" (cross-cut saw) or skidded logs with a team of horses. He was a "Donkey-puncher," or "Brush-gyppo," greased the chutes, or broke up logs jams with a peavy. He could be 15 years old, fresh from the old country, parents dead, working in the camps with his brothers. He might be fifty, no family, a boomer who followed good jobs, riding the freight cars to and from the coast. He could be

a married man from the town in the next draw whose wife saw him leave for the woods Sunday night and return late Saturday. He was isolated - his job took him miles from any town to a "rag camp" (tent bunk-houses) near a swollen river where he made his home from April to October.

### "HEADIN' FOR THE WOODS WITH A BINDLE AND A SLAVE CARD"

Lumberjacks carried their bedrolls (bindles) on their backs as they hopped freights into Spokane to buy

jobs from employment agencies who took the bindle stiff's last two dollars. Some lumberjacks would get to the camp with the work slip they had bought only to find that the same job had been sold to several other men. Many timber workers skipped the "slave card" and rustled a job by knowing when to show up in camp. Knowing where the food was good, who was hiring, and where the job was safe, took years of experience unless he knew the boss or had joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).



*International Timber Workers, Local 72 near 1st & Sherman, 1919. Lab-5-29*

**"HE HAS ONE TIE TO BIND HIM TO HIS FELLOW MEN, THE RED CARD OF THE WOBBLY."**

The Industrial Workers of the World had been formed in 1905 to organize workers into "One Big Union" by industry instead of by specific craft or trade. Its organizers rode the rails throughout North Idaho signing up the men. The small leather-bound booklet of the IWW could get a man a meal in a hobo camp, a safe ride on a freight and unite a worker with other lumberjacks who were struggling for better conditions in the woods. It could also get a man "blacklisted" by some camps. Faced with living a remote group life when working, and "on the rods" between jobs, the idea of the One Big Union made sense to the itinerant lumberjack.

The Wobblies in camp would organize meetings to discuss the grievances of the men, take a vote to elect representatives, and go to the boss with their demands. If the company turned a deaf ear to their petition, they would call a strike or burn their bedrolls and bunks so the companies would have to provide bedding. Some strikes lasted a few hours, others for weeks. When a company was particularly unrelenting, some lumberjacks would ruin equipment or slow down on the job in what they called "conscientious withdrawal of efficiency."

**"BURN THE BED BUGS AND GREY BACKS"**

Lumberjacks slept in crowded bunk houses in three-tiered shot-gun bunks (entered feet first) made of rough boards with no mattresses. They earned \$3.25 for a 10-hour day, paid \$1.25 for board and 50 cents a day for a can of oil which they used to douse their bunks and bunkhouse walls which were crawling with bed bugs and other vermin. Although many camps provided good food, others were plagued all summer with dysentery from spoiled food or unsani-

tary cook shacks. There were rarely facilities for bathing or laundry.

**"CALL OUT THE POLICE, THE NATIONAL GUARD, THEY'LL TELL YOU IT'S A CRIME TO HAVE A UNION CARD."**

In the spring of 1917, lumberjacks and millworkers in North Idaho joined a strike of 50,000 Pacific Northwest woodworkers lead by the IWW. They demanded the 8-hour day, no work on Sundays, clean bunks and cook shacks, toilets and laundry rooms, good treatment of horses, lights in the bunkhouses with tables for reading, medical care and no blacklisting of union men."

The strike paralyzed the timber industry in North Idaho for several months as whole camps slowed down or stopped work altogether. By fall of 1917 the timber companies, unwilling to grant demands, and unable to continue work, petitioned Governor Alexander to call out the National Guard. Aided by local law enforcement agencies and timber industry police, federal troops marched into the IWW halls in Spirit Lake, Sandpoint, Bonners Ferry, St. Maries and Spokane. They destroyed the halls and rounded up Wobblies. The Wobblies were put in "bullpens," makeshift jails, where they were held on charges of "Criminal Syndicalism."

The United States had entered World War I on April 6, 1917. Shortly thereafter Idaho passed a Criminal Syndicalism law aimed at the IWW whose national leaders had opposed what they called "imperialist war in Europe." The law also specifically forbade advocating violence in order to achieve demands. It became illegal to pass out IWW literature or to possess a Wobbly card.

The strikes went on until the early spring 1918 despite the arrests. As Senator Borah put it: "...you cannot

destroy the organization ... It is something you cannot get at. You cannot reach it. You do not know where it is. It is not in writing. It is not in anything else. It is a simple understanding between men."

### **THE LOYAL LEGION OF LOGGERS AND LUMBERMEN**

In the spring of 1918, Colonel Bryce Disque of the Idaho National Guard announced in North Idaho that the 8-hour day would be in effect in the camps for the duration of the war. He did this to end the strike and ensure continued timber production until the war ended which was on November 11, 1918. He formed the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen, a government union whose members were both workers and company managers. Any discussion of wages or conditions had to be taken before the Four-Ls. During World War I and well into the 1920s the Four-L unions flourished. The IWW, however, continued to organize and control some camps despite the government ban. The Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen held union picnics and marched in Labor Day parades.

### **BOOM AND BLACKLIST - THE 1920S**

After World War I, a surge of union activity ran through the country. In 1919, one out of every five workers nationwide went on strike. After the post-war organization drives of the IWW and American Federation of Labor, companies began to actively blacklist (refuse to hire) union members. In North Idaho, companies were aided in their efforts to rid the woods of the IWW by police and local vigilante committees. In 1922, the police of Spokane raided IWW halls and seized lists of all members in Washington and Idaho. The policy of police departments was to arrest every

member they could and charge him with Criminal Syndicalism.

In May of 1923, a committee of 200 vigilantes rounded up 28 IWW members in Bonners Ferry and illegally deported them to Montana.

In that same month 1,800 woodworkers answered the IWW call for a strike at Marble Creek. Similar job actions occurred through North Idaho during the 1920s some demands were met, others not. Conditions in the woods had improved in some camps but in others the pay was not much higher than before the war (\$4.00 in 1928) and complaints of poor food, bug-ridden bunkhouses, and company control of Four-L unions were often heard in the freight trains, hobo jungles and logging camps of North Idaho.

Lumber production rose, then dipped and rose again in the 1920s. At its highest point, in 1926, the ten counties of North Idaho produced 950,000,000 board feet of timber. In 1932, it would dip to 200,000,000 board feet.

### **DEPRESSION AND THE RELIEF WORKERS PROTECTIVE UNION**

Although production had boomed in North Idaho and the nation during the 1920s, wages were kept low. As a result, although there were big profits and investments in new equipment, workers in post-war Europe and the U.S. were unable to buy. With the drop in demand, along with over-production, came the Depression. Between 1930 and 1933, nearly 50 percent of the woodworkers in North Idaho were laid off.

The Relief Workers Protective Union organized, establishing offices in Coeur d'Alene and Sandpoint, during the bitter years between 1930 and 1934. Laid off

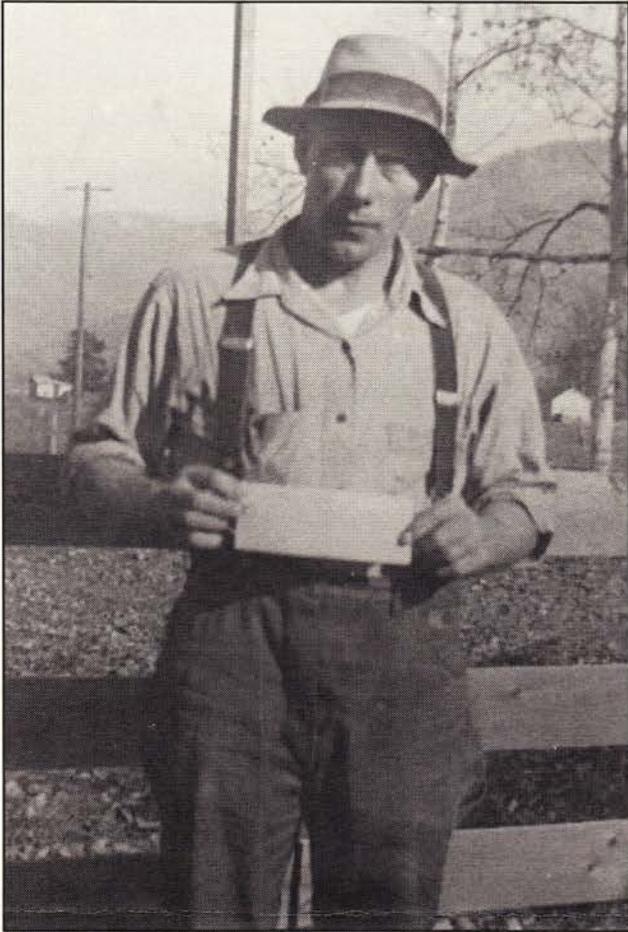
lumberjacks climbed utility poles to reconnect electricity which had been cut off when people "on relief" could not pay their bills. They reconnected water lines and helped evicted renters to put furniture which had been carted into the street by the sheriff, back into their homes. These actions forced power companies and landlords to petition the courts for second eviction orders. This gave renters an extra month in which to raise the money for rent, water, and power payments.

### **THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR**

The AFL first organized craft unions in 1886. During World War I there were locals of the International Union of Timber



*Relief Workers Protective Union members on Sherman Ave., 1933-1934. Lab-4-12*



*Bernard Deubel with the check he received in 1941. Lab-1-5*

Workers who gained charters from the AFL. In 1935 the Lumber and Sawmill Workers-AFL organized mill workers in the Inland Empire who were being paid 10-15 cents an hour.

In 1936 the LSW joined the Brotherhood of Carpenters who were AFL. In that year they struck for 20 cents an hour which was not gained until the next year. They did win the right to organize members during lunch break. In 1939 they struggled with companies who would not allow payroll deductions from worker's checks for group medical plans. During the strikes the union provided food and money for members and their families.

#### **THE LAST WOBBLY STRIKE IN NORTH IDAHO**

The Spring of 1936 brought IWW demands for \$5.00 per day for lumberjacks, a \$25.00 a month raise for all monthly men, time and half for overtime, board not to exceed 1.20 per day, no discrimination against union men, single bunks and a change of sheets and pillow cases once a week.

Demands were met at several camps. Where they were not, the IWW called strikes. Camps on the St. Joe, Coeur d'Alene, and Clearwater rivers were

struck. Pickets fought with men hired to take their jobs. Company railcars were destroyed and the IWW was blamed. Pickets were arrested, and on August 2, gunmen hired by a company near Pierce shot into a group of pickets wounding four and killing one. The gunmen and remaining pickets were arrested. Bonds of \$1,500 were placed against pickets while company gunmen (called "gun thugs" or "scab herders" by union men) were released on bonds of \$750. Governor Ben Ross declared martial law in the strike zone. Some of the strike demands were met and lumbermen went back to the job. It was the end of the IWW in North Idaho.

#### **CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE IWA**

The CIO was formed in 1937 and like the IWW sought to organize workers by industry instead of by craft or trade. Some early CIO organizers had been Wobblies. The timber industry was organized by the International Woodworkers-CIO.

Unlike the IWW, the IWA-CIO sought to collectively bargain for contracts with the lumber companies. The CIO increased in membership more than any group of unions in American history. With the formation of the National Labor Relations Board, members who were fired solely for belonging to a union could be reinstated. Still, it took Bernard Deubel a year and a half to get his job back after being fired in 1939 for being an official of the IWA. After the NLRB interviewed union and company men, and a long wait, he did not receive a check for back pay until 1941.

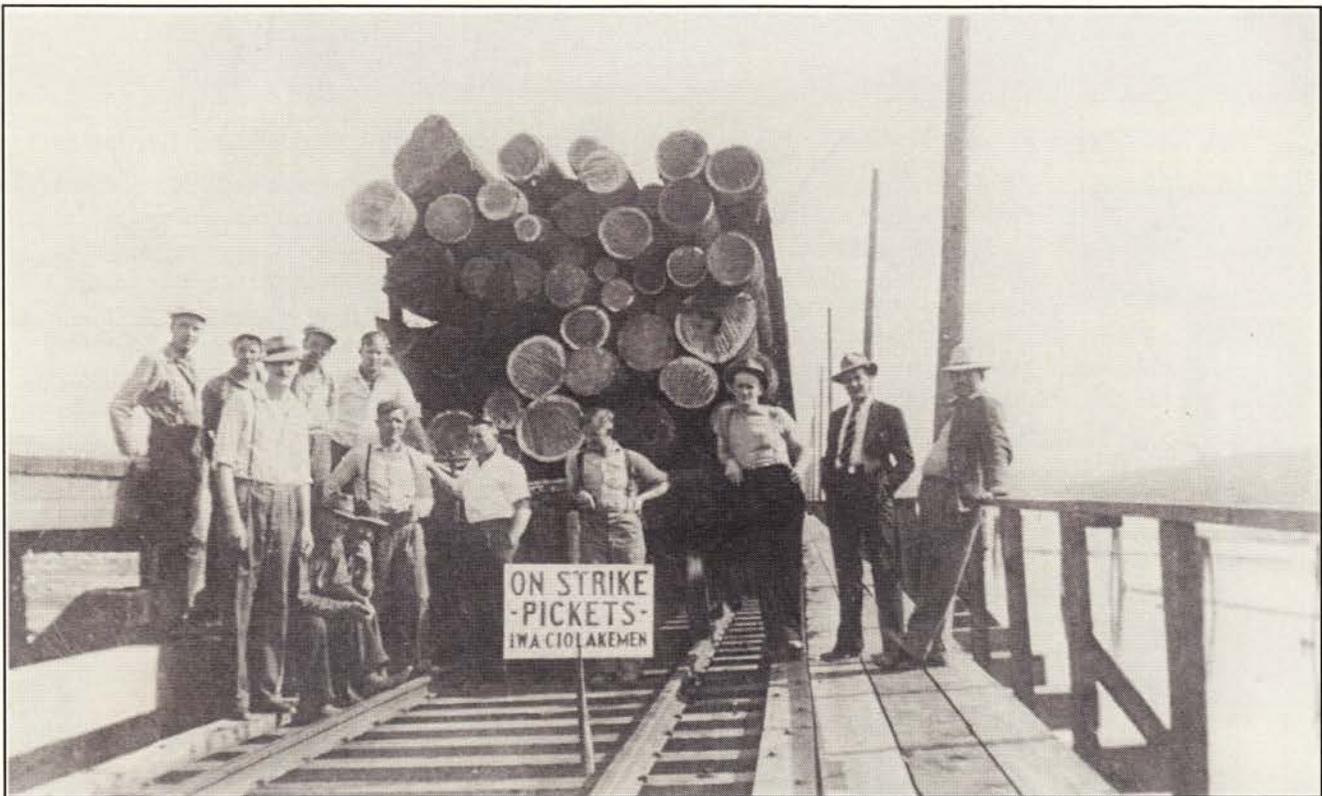
The IWA organized in the woods and mills seeking clean bunkhouses, better food, safety, shower and laundry facilities and better wages. The men of a logging camp took their grievances to a representative whom they elected. He in turn called in a regional representative and together they sought to organize a local. The NLRB insured that a vote of the workers for a union would be honored.

As before, when there was a strike, local police and company security officers protected workers who took the place of union men (in union parlance, "the scabs were protected by the goons").

#### **WORLD WAR II AND THE CHAIN SAW - 1940S**

Both AFL and CIO unions consented to freeze wages and not strike during the war. International Woodworkers in North Idaho mills were making 65 cents an hour on average for a 40-hour week. Nationwide, prices rose 48 per cent during World War II while wages rose only 15 per cent compared to prewar pay checks.

Loggers who left their cross-cut saws to join the army in 1942 would return in 1946 to find the woods buzz-



*Atlas Tie Strike, 1947. IWA CIO Lakemen on the Spokane International pier at Hubbard Ave. Lab-4-4*

ing with chainsaws.

**“THEY’RE DOIN’ A MAN’S JOB; THEY SHOULD GET A MAN’S WAGES”**

The Lumber and Sawmill Workers-AFL organized women as they entered sawmills to replace men fighting in World War II. At first employers tried to hire women at less wages for the same job men were doing. The LSW got companies to pay equal wages for equal work. They did, however, comply with State Industrial guidelines that forbade women to lift more than 60 pounds on a job, which still prevented women from getting higher pay for harder work.

**LAST IWA STRIKE BEFORE TAFT HARTLEY**

An average IWA mill worker made \$1.22 an hour in 1947. In June of that year 5,000 IWA loggers and mill workers struck for a 7 1/2 cent-an-hour raise which would bring them on a par with wages paid to workers on the coast. The strike extended from the Montana border to Spokane and from the Canadian border to Lewiston. All but nine locals won their demands within a few weeks. Other locals stayed out until October and did not receive the raise until six months after they had gone back to work.

During the strike the Taft Hartley Law was passed. It reinstated injunctions, outlawed mass picketing, encouraged the passage of state anti-union “right-to-work” laws, established a sixty-day cooling off period

in which strikes could not be declared and prohibited secondary boycotts. Through these provisions an employer could break a strike through injunctions against picketing and other standard strike procedures. He could refuse to bargain collectively, even by shutting down his plant to prevent negotiations.

Many of Taft-Hartley’s supporters in Congress justified their stand by the Cold War, concentrating on the anti-Communist provisions of the law -- all union officers were forced to take oaths that they were not Communists. The Cold War Red-Scare split unions. Many unions and union members became increasingly afraid that they would be smeared as “reds” if they fought what was described as an anti-Communist measure.

Local papers heralded the bill in headlines that read: “New Era Dawns For Non-Union Workers.” Some national CIO leaders pushed for a nation-wide general strike to protest passage of Taft-Hartley. This action was rejected by the national AFL.

**TIMBER UNIONS SPLIT AND UNITE**

During the 1930s and 40s the LSW-AFL lost members to the IWA-CIO but they continued to organize workers in mills and logging company railroads. In 1956, the AFL and CIO merged. The LSW later became the Lumber, Production and Industrial Workers Union AFL-CIO. The International Woodworkers are AFL-CIO.

# Museum News

## A Message From the Board



I'd like to thank everyone for their continued support of the mission of the Museum of North Idaho. The support we felt at the *Friends of History* events was great. The *Friends of History* will continue to host one-hour events that introduce the Museum and the importance of our local history to the community at large through the coming year. These are not fundraising efforts per se; no solicitations for building fund donations take place at these events. Rather, these are informational meetings with refreshments to educate the

public about the services provided by our staff and volunteers and the value of the Museum to our community. Please let us know if you can host an hour for a small group of friends at your home or have suggestions as to whom we should be inviting to these informal gatherings.

The Board continues to follow its long range plan and positioning the Museum for acquiring the resources needed to serve the community. We are a growing and changing community and keeping a connection to our heritage is important to the identity of our community and our citizens.

A new year – and a new exhibit season – are upon us. Volunteers are vital assets in producing results at the Museum: serving on the board, exhibits, collections, gift shop, book publishing committee, docents at the Fort Sherman location, Friends of History assisting with the Capital Campaign in our quest for new facilities. This year's lobby exhibit will focus on the regional lumber industry...and its passing. Check your interests and calendar and consider some volunteer time at the Museum.

Kathy Arneson - Chair

## Donation Offers Big Tax Benefit

Please consider the Museum of North Idaho for a major donation and in your estate and tax planning. The Museum is a 501c 3 non-profit organization. As an Idaho taxpayer, you can claim the credit for your contribution to the educational entity deduction, which may be an additional tax benefit to you. Please consult with your attorney or accountant about the benefits.

## Please Serve on the Museum Board

The nominating committee is seeking individuals for the Board of Trustees. This is an interesting and crucial time for the museum with the beginning of raising funds for much-needed expansion of programming and a larger facility. We need your support more than ever; please consider serving on the board. Contact Dorothy at 664-3448 or email: [dd@museumni.org](mailto:dd@museumni.org) for information. The membership elects board members in April for three year terms.

## Building Fund Donations

Wayne & Fay Sweney

Jim McGoldrick

Elisa Donohue

Grant Silvernale

Mae Ann Henderson

Lee & Bonnie Fossum

Joy Porter

## Cash Donations

Ray & Eleanor Grannis

The Negative View

## Our Appreciation to these 2008 Community Partners

**US Bank**

**Mountain West Bank**

**Specialty Tree Services**

**RDI Heating & Cooling**

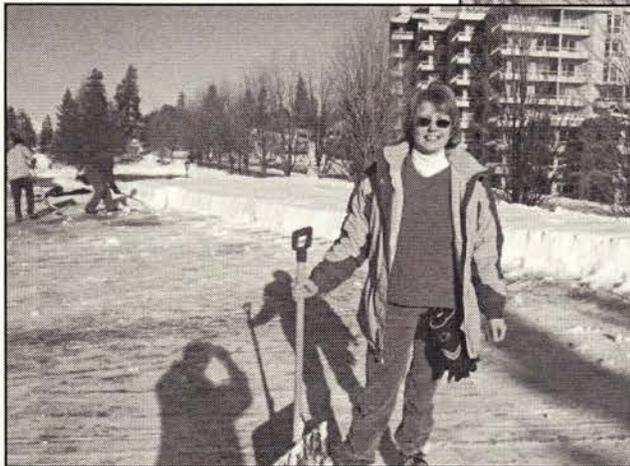
**Panhandle State Bank**

**STCU Spokane Teachers Credit Union**

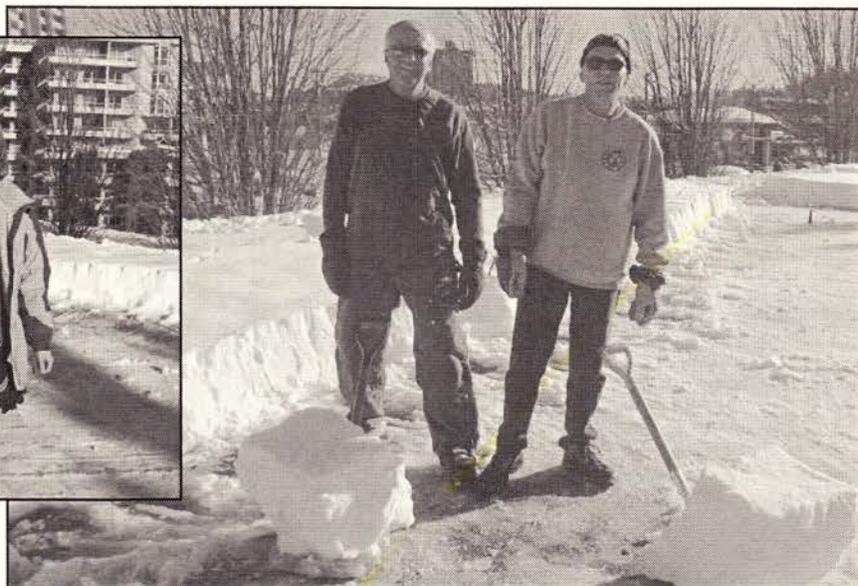
**Empire Airlines**

For information on how you can be recognized as a 2009 *Community Sponsor* and contribute to the preservation of local history please call 664-3448.

Web site hosting by  
Group Argia SA at [www.argia.net](http://www.argia.net)



Director Dorothy Dahlgren taking a break from shoveling Jan. 4, 2009.



Craig Wise and Dale Schultz on the Museum roof Sunday Jan. 4.

## Tons of Snow Removed

With record snow in December we were concerned about the snow load on the Museum's roof. The city owns the building but the Museum is responsible for maintenance. So, volunteers Geoff Howard, Craig Wise, Dale Schultz, Ivan Eagan and I put in over 30 hours shoveling the roof January 3 and 4.

## Artifact Donations Since November

Jean Gabrielsen: Metsker Maps from area counties.

Darleen Sheldon from Donna Madson: Scrap books of White Pine clippings 1947-1948 and photos.

## Photos Copied

Michelle Reynolds: St. Maries Airport photos 1968 to the 1980s.

## Lumbering Artifacts Needed

If you have information, photographs or artifacts concerning sawmills or logging operations in Kootenai, Benewah or Shoshone counties please contact the Museum. The 2009 feature exhibit will be about the timber industry.

## New Postal Regulations

If your address is changing or has changed please be sure the Museum has your correct address. We will now be charged for any undeliverable mail.

We would like to thank all of those who responded to the membership renewal requests. We could not operate without all of our member's support, so thank you. If you received a renewal notice or the date on the mailing label is near or past please send in your membership today. Increasing our membership is vital to the health and growth of the Museum. This is a great way to show your support for local history.

Numbers count! Ask your friends to join or give a membership as a gift.

The date on your mailing label is when your membership is due for renewal. If there is not a date please send in today.

### ANNUAL MEETING/DINNER APRIL 21

Please mark your calendar for the Museum's annual meeting Tues. April 21. Plan to join us for history and great food at the Hayden Lake Country Club. More information will be mailed in late March along with the ballot.

### Memorials

For Louise Shadduck from Kay & JoAnn Nelson

For Roger Hudson from Kay & JoAnn Nelson

### Memorials to the Museum

Remember your loved ones and friends with a memorial to the Museum of North Idaho. Your cash donation builds the Museum's endowment fund. The name of the deceased is placed on the memorial plaque at the Museum.

Memorial For \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Whom to notify \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Amount \_\_\_\_\_