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Samuel R. Mohler

WHEN THE Federal Census was taken in 1940, the population of Ellensburg, Washington, numbered 5,944. Several hundred have been added since, but there has been no wartime boom. As the home of Central Washington College of Education, the seat of government of Kittitas County, and the trading center for a prosperous agricultural and stock-raising community, it is (except perhaps during the annual Rodeo) a quiet town of steady habits with a particularly stable economy. It is doubtful if any of its present inhabitants expect it to become a great metropolis, and perhaps few would desire it to be. Yet Ellensburg in the late eighties and early nineties was the scene of feverish activity and great expectations which now appear nothing less than fantastic. One local newspaper summarized the prospects for growth in precise mathematical formula.

[Ellensburg] has 4,000 population now; will have 7,000 in 1890; 12,000 in 1891; 18,000 in 1892; 24,000 in 1893; 30,000 in 1894 and 40,000 in 1896.¹

Beyond that, who could predict or set any limits? To many, the trend of the times seemed to justify such buoyant optimism. As a writer in the *Portland Oregonian* pointed out at the close of 1888:

Ellensburg is one of four towns in the [Washington] territory which is growing with astonishing rapidity, Seattle, Tacoma and Spokane Falls being the other three. Proportionately speaking, Ellensburg is growing faster than either of her sister cities whose progress has been well advertised.²

Certainly Ellensburg³ more than doubled her population in the year 1888, and probably was, as the boosters claimed, the only city in Washington to do so.⁴

Indeed one local newspaper questioned whether any other city in the United States had doubled its population that year, "when in that doubling over 1500 additional inhabitants have had to be secured."⁵ Yet the writer hastened to add that Ellensburg was not

¹ Ellensburg *Capital*, July 25, 1889.

² Quoted in the Ellensburg *Capital*, January 10, 1889.

³ For the sake of uniformity the original spelling of Ellensburg will be observed hereafter in this paper. The Post Office Department dropped the final "h" in 1894.

⁴ Ellensburg *Capital*, December 28, 1888.

⁵ *Kittitas Localizer*, February 9, 1889.

just one more boom town, for "the growth, though rapid, has been natural."⁶

Natural or not, the town was obviously unprepared for the sudden influx.

The Electric Light and Power Co. started in with a plant sufficiently large to accommodate the demands of Ellensburg for two years. It fell short in four months, when the capacity was doubled, and still the cry is for more light and a plant that will supply a city of 20,000 people.

The Northern Pacific Railroad Company, when they constructed the depot building and round house, thought they anticipated the future, but they didn't. These buildings will be enlarged this season. The Ellensburg post office was enlarged last summer, and now it is too small by half. Another and greater enlargement is absolutely necessary. The court house was thought to be big enough to meet the demands of a growing city and county, but it is now an insignificant building, utterly inadequate for the county business. The public school house was good enough for the village days of Ellensburg but now it is so small that only one fourth the children of the city are accommodated.⁷

These tangible evidences of growth were matched only by the enterprising spirit of the people. No wonder, then, that the Portland *Oregonian* commented, "There is no place more talked of, more prominent and surer to become an important point in the future than Ellensburg."⁸

If the casual visitor to this city of destiny inquired into the economic basis for such dazzling anticipations, the three newspapers offered the answers.⁹ They assured the reader, first of all, that the incoming state of Washington was about to experience a tremendous increase of immigration. Where else could ambitious young men go, now that the East was overcrowded? And what part of America could offer so much in opportunities to exploit the great wealth of natural resources? That Washington was to become the great industrial state of the West was taken for granted. To a greater or less extent all towns and cities in the new state would prosper. But there were special reasons for expecting Ellensburg to take high rank among the greatest.

In accounting for the rapid growth, the newspapers gave due credit to the Northern Pacific Railroad Company. Though that cor-

⁶ *Kittitas Localizer*, February 9, 1889.

⁷ *Ellensburg Capital*, April 25, 1889.

⁸ Quoted in the *Ellensburg Capital*, March 21, 1889.

⁹ These were the *Kittitas Localizer* (after July, 1889, the *Ellensburg Localizer*), the *Ellensburg Register* (later the *Washington State Register*), and the *Ellensburg Capital*. Practically complete files may be found at the library of Central Washington College of Education and the Ellensburg Public Library. The present study is based largely upon these newspapers.

poration frequently ignored the request that its line pass through an existing town and decreed that another site on its own lands must be chosen, it saw fit to leave Ellensburg where it was. When the railway construction crews arrived from the East in 1886, Ellensburg became the temporary terminus of the line, and benefited from the free spending of hundreds of workingmen's wages. After the road was completed across the Cascades, the permanent roundhouse and the repair shops for the division were located at Ellensburg. The crews of trains, repairmen, and maintenance men swelled the population by several hundred. A large part of the monthly payroll of \$30,000 to \$50,000 was spent locally.¹⁰ More important was the fact that the railroad brought Ellensburg and its environs into touch with new markets. Prior to 1886 all supplies for the town and for Kittitas County were hauled in wagons from The Dalles in Oregon, 150 miles away.¹¹ The same wagons carried local products as "back load," but the rates were so high that few exports besides hides and wool could bear the expense.¹² The railroad, of course, would change all that. Cheap and speedy transportation would inaugurate a new era in livestock raising and in agriculture, especially when immigrants to the new state came to realize the profits to be made in producing for the Puget Sound and foreign export trade.¹³

In still another way the Northern Pacific railroad would add to the prosperity and growth of the region. The Okanogan and Big Bend country to the north had become, by 1889, the scene of especially lucrative gold and silver mining. Ellensburg newspapers reported hundreds of miners flocking into the area. Foodstuffs and supplies were in great demand, and they must be brought in from the outside. The Northern Pacific could bring them only part way. It intersected the Columbia at Pasco, but between that point and the new mining developments lay Priest Rapids, which were a formidable obstacle to steamboat navigation. This was Ellensburg's opportunity. From the Northern Pacific depot freight could be hauled in wagons to a point above Priest Rapids, either Port Eaton (near present Beverly), twenty-eight miles east, or north to Rock Island. From either point men and supplies were carried by steamboat to

¹⁰ Ellensburg *Capital*, June 20, 1889; *Washington State Register*, October 7, 1891. For an account of Ellensburg before 1889, see W. D. Lyman, *History of the Yakima Valley, Washington* (Indianapolis, 1919), I, 643-85. In 1883, three years before the railroad came, the population was only 450. *Ibid.*

¹¹ Ellensburg *Capital*, special Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition issue, April 16, 1909.

¹² Ellensburg *Localizer*, January 24, 1891.

¹³ 3,000 head of cattle were shipped west from Ellensburg in 1888. C. M. Barton, "Ellensburg in Central Washington," *Northwest Illustrated Magazine*, VII (April, 1889), 17.

the mines.¹⁴ As the nearest town of any size with a railroad connection, Ellensburg claimed a monopoly, and actually enjoyed the lion's share of that freighting business. Moreover, the town became a recognized outfitting center for mining supplies. It was this that caused local enthusiasts to speak of Ellensburg as the "Denver" of Washington, which, like the city in Colorado, should have a vast mineral hinterland tributary to itself.¹⁵ As the Okanogan trade developed, proposals for a railroad from Ellensburg to the Columbia were made. The Northern Pacific was importuned to build such a connection, but its promoters declined to do so, though they offered "moral support."¹⁶ Local enterprise was then enlisted, and in 1889 the Ellensburg, Columbia and Eastern Railroad was organized.¹⁷ The local Board of Trade raised a subsidy of \$65,000 or more, a right of way was secured, and ten or eleven miles of track were actually graded.¹⁸ The company announced that cars would be running from Ellensburg to the Columbia River by September 1, 1890.¹⁹ "Ellensburg has much to hope for from this line," said the *Localizer*, "and the sooner it is completed, the sooner will she reap the reward."²⁰ But the project lagged, due to inadequate backing, and as hard times settled down, it was abandoned.²¹

At least one other railroad project was envisioned with the Okanogan mining trade in view. This was the Ellensburg, Big Bend and Salmon River line, which was to intersect the Columbia at Rock Island and roughly to parallel the river to Ruby City on the Conconnully, thus offering all-rail transportation to the heart of the

¹⁴ The steamboat from Rock Island to the mouth of the Okanogan was named the *City of Ellensburg* and was owned by local men.

¹⁵ Ellensburg *Capital*, June 27, 1889. That the freighting business was rather extensive may be seen from an advertisement in 1891 for 100 teams to be used in freighting to Rock Island. Ellensburg *Capital*, April 18, 1889. The trade was said to amount to \$2,000,000. *Ibid.*, September 26, 1889.

¹⁶ Ellensburg *Capital*, March 14, 1889.

¹⁷ Mr. Thomas Nixon of Tacoma was the initiator of the project, although local people were active in its management. Ellensburg *Localizer*, December 17, 1892; Lyman, *op. cit.*, I, 694.

¹⁸ Ellensburg *Capital*, March 21, 1889; *Kittitas Localizer*, April 6, 1889. See also Lyman, *op. cit.*, I, 694. According to Lyman, from \$75,000 to \$100,000 was raised locally.

¹⁹ Ellensburg *Localizer*, January 25, April 19, 1890.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ The newspapers of 1889-1891 contain many notices of attempts to finance the railroad to the Columbia. The company was capitalized first at \$1,500,000 and then at \$4,500,000. Thomas Nixon and other promoters attempted to sell stock in the East, but there were few takers. Apparently the subsidy was spent on the ten-mile grade east of Ellensburg. In any case the advent of the Great Northern would have ended the Ellensburg monopoly of the Okanogan trade. However, it was expected that the Northern Pacific would eventually build from Sprague directly across the state to connect with the Ellensburg line at the Columbia. Had that been done, the road would have been of permanent utility.

mineral empire.²² Other railroads between the Sound and Spokane were shown on the maps of 1889 as passing through Ellensburg, the Seattle Lake Shore and the Northern Pacific Short Line, among them.²³ After all, it was argued, Snoqualmie Pass offered the easiest grade across the mountains, and it was only good business for transcontinental lines to build where construction would be most economical. When it became known that the Great Northern was to be built from the East to Puget Sound, there was a flurry of excitement in Ellensburg, for surely the road would pass directly through the town.²⁴ Ellensburg might well become the great railroad hub of Washington, the "Omaha of the West!" The day was to come when the Great Northern would build not through Ellensburg or near it, but through the heart of the mining country itself. It meant the end of Ellensburg's profitable freighting business, but the men of 1889 could not foresee that.

Important as transportation and trade were, these were by no means Ellensburg's only assets. Local publicists were sure she was destined to become the industrial center of the Pacific Northwest. It had long been recognized, they declared, that within Kittitas County lay the "greatest iron mines this side of Lake Superior . . . the equal of Alabama's iron mines." These would provide ore enough "to keep scores of furnaces and rolling mills running for ages."²⁵ The immensity of the deposits had long been known, according to the Ellensburg *Capital*, but their development had been retarded by Washington's territorial status.

In Kittitas county a large foreign company, backed by millions, is ready to develop the great iron mines and put in extensive furnaces and rolling mills. The company can now secure title at an early date and will be able to prosecute work this season . . . this iron company will give employment to several thousand men and its payroll will be greater than any similar enterprise in the Northwest.²⁶

Presumably the company referred to was the English Moss Bay Company, which had control of a "number of iron claims within twenty-five miles of the main line [of the Northern Pacific] at Cle Elum." "Immense works" to manufacture iron and steel would soon be erected. That the "Pittsburgh of the Pacific Coast" would be located in Kittitas County was believed by many as "beyond a

²² An advertisement by Walters and Company, real estate dealers, in *Northwest Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, VII (April, 1889), shows the projected route.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Ellensburg *Localizer*, October 11, 1890. James J. Hill was quoted as saying that the Snoqualmie route might be selected.

²⁵ Ellensburg *Capital*, November 22, 1888, February 28, April 4, June 20, 1889.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, February 28, 1889.

doubt," and of course the logical spot was Ellensburg.²⁷ Pennsylvania producers were reported to be very much interested in the Kittitas field, for the quality of ore was considered especially well adapted to the making of steel.²⁸ There were skeptics in Ellensburg, to be sure, but these could hardly doubt the evidence before their eyes when iron was produced from Kittitas ores at the local foundry. As the editor of the *Localizer*, usually the most conservative of Ellensburg's newspapers, said:

The very best and strongest arguments in favor of iron works at Ellensburg that have yet come to our notice were seen yesterday. They were presented in the guise of five bars of iron recently made at this place. Grouped around the bars were samples of all the different varieties of iron ore found in Kittitas county. Everything in the shape of raw materials necessary to the manufacture of iron and steel abounds; only capital and skill are lacking. Well directed effort will certainly secure these. . . . When we begin making iron at Ellensburg a hundred other manufacturing possibilities will open to us, and the city and county will grow at a rate most surprising to us all.²⁹

With an abundance of iron ore and the proximity of coal fields at Roslyn, Ellensburg had one further inducement to offer manufacturers. That was water power. The Yakima River was to be harnessed for industrial uses. The *Capital* observed that "properly utilized the water power of Ellensburg can be made to contribute millions to the wealth of the city and at the same time give employment to hundreds of people."³⁰ These industrial potentialities, so absorbing to Ellensburg's own citizens, apparently were less alluring to those elsewhere who could have provided the necessary capital. Eventually local people were to attempt to produce iron and other manufactures on their own account, as will presently appear.

While many local people were thinking in terms of a great industrial city, Washington was making the transition from territorial status to statehood. That event, so long anticipated by the people, was of particular interest to Ellensburg. It was not improbable that a change of location for the seat of government would be made. In the thirty-six years since Olympia had been selected as the capital of Washington Territory, much dissatisfaction with the choice had been expressed, and proposals for a change had been made on many occasions.³¹ The chief objection was that Olympia

²⁷ C. M. Barton, "Ellensburg in Central Washington," *Northwest Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, VII (April, 1889), 15.

²⁸ *Ellensburg Localizer*, April 5, 1890.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, December 20, 1890.

³⁰ *Ellensburg Capital*, February 14, 1889.

³¹ On the earlier phases of agitation on this matter, see Arthur S. Beardsley, "Early Efforts to Locate the Capital of Washington Territory," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, XXXII (1941), 239-87.

was not centrally located. If a removal should be made on that account, a logical place would be Ellensburg, the "exact geographical center of the state." To agitate for such a move seems to have been the chief objective of a newspaper whose editor and publisher, Colonel A. N. Hamilton, was also active in real estate circles. He appeared sufficiently confident of the outcome to call his paper the Ellensburg *Capital*. Early in 1889, months before the constitutional convention concluded to allow the people to determine the location by ballot, he urged citizens of Ellensburg to awaken to their opportunity.

While Ellensburg has all the resources necessary to make a large and prosperous commercial and manufacturing city, she should not lose sight of the fact that the capital will bring wealth and a certain amount of political and social prestige that is not to be despised.³²

During the spring and summer months of 1889 the *Capital* pressed the issue constantly, asserting that the question should be left to the people to decide at the same time the vote on the constitution was taken. Indeed, that newspaper took credit for the "Ellensburg plan" eventually adopted, and probably it did exert considerable influence. In the meantime, many another town put its best foot forward. The *Capital* recognized only one serious rival besides Olympia, however, and that one was North Yakima.³³ Here was a foe worthy of the editor's mettle. The nature of the contest and the arguments advanced by each contender have been admirably summarized by Dr. Arthur S. Beardsley in earlier numbers of the *Quarterly*, and need not be repeated here.³⁴ It is Dr. Beardsley's opinion that "had North Yakima and Ellensburg united their efforts to relocate the capital at the one town or the other, or perhaps in the hills between them, they might have succeeded in securing its location in central Washington."³⁵ It was not in the nature of Ellensburg to compromise, however, and after all, she had a larger population in 1889 than did either Olympia or Yakima, and, according to local enthusiasts, her prospects for future growth were immeasurably better.

By April of that fateful year the real estate men were doing their part. The pioneer firm of Walters and Company announced the opening of the Washington State Capitol Park addition. Underneath a large picture which was obviously intended to suggest a capitol building, a large display advertisement informed the reader

³² Ellensburg *Capital*, February, 28, 1889.

³³ Present Yakima.

³⁴ Arthur S. Beardsley, "Later Attempts to Relocate the Capital of Washington," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, XXXII (1941), 401-24.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, XXXII, 403.

that a "magnificent park site . . . surrounded by a 100 foot drive nearly 4000 feet in length" was set aside for state capitol and public park purposes.

This free gift to the citizens of the City of Ellensburg and State of Washington, at the present value of raw land, represents fully \$10,000. Improved and adorned as we intend it shall be, the value of this donation will increase ten-fold. Surrounding the State Capitol Park we are platting a few gilt-edged residence blocks and lots.³⁶

How many of the "gilt-edged lots" were sold is not clear. Washington State Capitol Park has long since lapsed into cow pasture. But apparently there was some local rivalry as to just where in Ellensburg the public buildings should be located. In an entirely different part of town (the east side), Capitol Hill (now Craig's Hill) was named, and a large building erected by B. E. Craig was rumored to be the future governor's mansion.³⁷ Local rivalries, however, could be adjusted later. The all-important thing was to get the capitol within the city. In her strenuous efforts Ellensburg was aided by many other towns, both east and west of the Cascades. Favorable notices and arguments appeared in newspapers in places as remote as Spokane, Waitsburg, Orondo, Tacoma, Seattle, Anacortes, Davenport, Puyallup, and Whatcom. The local press made the most of these friendly gestures and printed many of the articles in full.

In the midst of the contest came the Ellensburg fire. Her sister cities supposed that catastrophe would mean an end of her capital aspirations. But they little understood the spirit of Ellensburg. While the fire was raging, the governor of the territory, eager to assist the homeless people, wired, "What do you want at Ellensburg?" The answer was prompt, decisive, and to the point. "We want the Capital!"³⁸ As far as the local press was concerned, the fire gave Ellensburg a golden opportunity to demonstrate that she was worthy of the prize. Every new brick building which arose, almost before the ashes were cold, was only one more argument why the city of enterprise was the one to which the capital should be entrusted.

As the campaign was continued through the late summer and fall, it increased in intensity. The contestants did not "pull their punches." Not content with advertising the advantages of their own city, the newspapers denounced the claims made by their rivals. The

³⁶ Ellensburg *Capital*, April 4, 1889. This "park" was considerably north of the city limits, as at present defined.

³⁷ *Northwest Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, VII (April, 1889), 20. Capitol Avenue at the foot of the hill retains the name.

³⁸ The incident was related by the poet Joaquin Miller. Ellensburg *Capital*, September 26, 1889.

alleged falsifications by North Yakima men drew the fire of the Ellensburgh *Capital*, in particular, while the desire of Olympia to retain the seat of government was ridiculed. She had benefited from its presence for thirty-six years and was still smaller than Ellensburgh! The people should give the capital to a city which was neither owned body and soul by the Northern Pacific, as was North Yakima, nor moribund, as was Olympia.

On October 1, 1889, the people of the territory themselves spoke, although with uncertain voice. When the vote was counted, no one city had a clear majority. The three highest were Olympia with 25,490 votes, North Yakima, 14,718, and Ellensburgh, 12,833, with only 2,139 cast for other points. If the chief exponent of Ellensburgh's claims was disappointed, he failed to show it. In the next issue of his paper he demonstrated his resiliency by saying:

Capital or no capital, Ellensburgh speeds along and will get there just the same. No grass in her streets, no flies on her back, no lard on her bangs. Whoop her up again boys!³⁹

In the absence of a majority, a second election was necessary. The legislature ordered that one be held in November of the following year. But it was an anticlimax as far as Ellensburgh and Yakima were concerned. Both cities continued to regard themselves as in the race, and neither would yield to the other. The *Localizer* indignantly repudiated false reports that Ellensburgh had withdrawn, but continued rather tamely: "We hope to see a good sound vote for Ellensburgh. It will not cost anyone anything to vote for Ellensburgh. We want to see a respectable vote cast for the central city."⁴⁰ In the second election Olympia won easily, with 37,413 votes. Ellensburgh was in second place, but it was a very poor second, with only 7,722 votes.

Thus there passed before the eyes of the charmed population of Ellensburgh one dazzling prospect after another. Whether their town should be a railway hub, a distribution and supply point, a great manufacturing center, or the state capital was beside the point. Ellensburgh might become all of these and more. When one considers, in addition, that there were many whose business was to promote Ellensburgh real estate, it is not difficult to understand why there was a fantastic expansion of the city limits. In the years 1888-1891, twenty-five additions to the city were platted, twenty of them in 1888 and 1889.⁴¹ A high-pressure publicity campaign to attract outside capital was a favorite technique of the promoters. The method used by at least one large firm saved considerable outlay in cash. A

³⁹ Ellensburgh *Capital*, October 3, 1889.

⁴⁰ Ellensburgh *Localizer*, October 25, 1890.

⁴¹ Lyman, *op. cit.*, I, 644.

protesting neighbor called attention to the reason for so many flattering editorials and notices given Ellensburgh by newspapers throughout the Northwest:

In return for this very questionable procedure, they get a lot in the Washington State Capitol Park. . . . It is a good farm situated a long distance from that town, which has been spoiled by cutting it up into lots for the purpose of obtaining a cheap advertisement for the town and a shrewd firm of realty dealers.⁴²

Perhaps that subsidy system was also responsible for so many favorable articles on Ellensburgh published in such papers as the *Portland Oregonian*, the *Chicago Graphic*, and the *Philadelphia Railway Record*. As these were copied or summarized and presented by the local papers as evidence that Ellensburgh was cutting a figure in out-of-state circles, the readers might have concluded that there was a remarkable similarity among them. Pat phrases and pet adjectives suggest that the articles originated not far from Ellensburgh in the first place! But there was nothing niggardly about the promotion campaigns. When necessary, real money was spent. In April, 1889, there appeared a special Ellensburgh edition of the *Northwest Illustrated Monthly Magazine*,⁴³ published in Minneapolis-St. Paul. It was reported that Ellensburgh's businessmen paid \$3,000 for 20,000 copies, most of which were circulated in the East.⁴⁴ Thirteen full pages were devoted to the twenty-four photographs, drawings, and eloquent textual description of Ellensburgh and its environs. It is difficult to imagine anything more that could have been said on the subject. In addition, five local real estate firms took full-page display advertisements, while banks and investment companies and the Board of Trade did their part by setting forth the amazing opportunities to be found there. To be sure, some carping critics complained that the pictures did not do justice to "beautiful Ellensburgh," but the total result was doubtless that Ellensburgh was advertised favorably all over the country.

The effects of this strenuous publicity campaign seemed to justify the effort. Persons in the East who had money to invest began to put it into Ellensburgh real estate. By the nature of the case, these operations cannot be followed in detail, but notices in the local press showed which way the wind was blowing. Thus during the first week of January, 1889, two "shrewd and intelligent gentlemen" from Elmira, New York, who were attracted by the name and fame of

⁴² *Yakima Herald*, quoted in the *Ellensburgh Capital*, June 27, 1889. The *Capital*, whose editor and publisher was a member of that particular real estate firm, attempted to justify the practice.

⁴³ This was not an unheard-of practice. A special Tacoma edition had appeared shortly before.

⁴⁴ *Ellensburgh Capital*, April 11, 1889, quoting the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

the future capital of Washington purchased "quite a number of good corners." This activity created quite a "flurry" in real estate, "property changing hands rapidly at enhanced values."⁴⁵ A month later it was observed that "Tacoma parties who have made former purchases in Ellensburg" were in the city again "for the purpose of investing in more property." In May, "180 lots were sold . . . to a syndicate of New York" whose officers indicated their intention "to put up a number of brick blocks," while in June it was reported that "Kansas capitalists have bought largely of good inside property."⁴⁶ The real estate firm of Walters and Company pointed out that "the free investment of eastern capital in this city is an excellent evidence of the esteem in which Ellensburg realty is held." That firm also advertised that it had "an unlimited amount of eastern money . . . to loan at low interest and long time on select city and country property."⁴⁷

The prices of unimproved city property in early 1889 suggest the speculative spirit of the times. Many vacant lots in the business area sold for as much as \$150 a front foot. Two unimproved lots, which were purchased for \$1,000 in 1887, brought \$5,000 a year later, \$8,000 in February, 1889, and \$10,000 was offered for them in May. A capitalist from Portland purchased a vacant corner lot, 90 by 45 feet, for \$15,000, but said he was not certain whether he should build or hold it for a higher price.⁴⁸ And yet, said the relatively conservative *Localizer*, "no wild speculative fever" had seized the citizens or the visitors who came to invest. For, it was asserted: "There is not a piece of property, if bought at ruling prices, but could be made to pay a net of 12 per cent investment with fair improvements thereon, and this investment would be vouchsafed for a period of years. No danger exists of a possible reaction. . . ."⁴⁹ The Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* also reassured prospective investors, saying that "the city has reached a position where all uncertainty is passed, and ahead progress is absolutely assured. It would be impossible to lose upon investment judiciously made in Ellensburg."⁵⁰

As new additions to the city were laid out, one after another, extending farther and farther into the open country, the problems of transportation to the business section arose. A metropolis without a streetcar line was unthinkable. Thus, in April, 1889, the streetcar franchise was granted to John V. Moffitt of Wichita, Kansas, who was connected with the Lauderdale syndicate. A complete network

⁴⁵ Ellensburg *Capital*, January 3, 1889.

⁴⁶ *Kittitas Localizer*, February 2, May 25, 1889; Ellensburg *Capital*, June 20, 1889.

⁴⁷ Ellensburg *Capital*, May 23, June 29, 1889.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, March 21, May 2, May 16, 1889. In each case full details as to description and purchaser were given.

⁴⁹ *Kittitas Localizer*, February 9, 1889.

⁵⁰ Quoted in the Ellensburg *Capital*, March 21, 1889.

of rails was envisaged, connecting each part of the city with the central business area and with the Northern Pacific depot. Walters and Company gave a liberal bonus to extend the tracks to their newest and most remote project, the Capitol Park addition. The franchise was originally for a horsecar line, but the city council requested the company to change to an electric motor line "to meet the increasing demands of a growing city." "It is fair to presume," said the *Capital* in May, 1889, "that within the next ninety days, Ellensburg's new electric motor line will be in active service." Iron for the tracks and several street cars were reported "on their way to this city over the Northern Pacific."⁵¹ Apparently the building of the track reached the point of laying ties in one part of the city before the fire of July 4.⁵² However, the failure to complete the line afterwards cost Moffitt the franchise. In February of the following year, it was given to W. E. Anderson of Tacoma. The *Localizer* noted hopefully that "we have been assured that work will commence soon."⁵³ One delay followed another, however, until it was apparent that Ellensburg would have less use for a network of street railways than was once supposed.

Just at the peak of expansion came the great fire which caused so many changes. Two weeks before the catastrophe, the *Capital* noted that sales of real property in the first six months of 1889 totaled over \$3,000,000. Special mention was made in the same issue of the amount of building completed and under construction. Eighteen hundred front feet of solid brick buildings had been erected since January 1, "enough to place Ellensburg at the head of improvements over all other towns in Washington in proportion to population."⁵⁴ At least ten miles of new sidewalk had been laid, and many blocks of streets were being graded and macadamized. A new bank, the third in the city, had just been established. Lloyd and Company, of Des Moines, had recently opened a department store with a stock of goods valued at \$100,000, while fifteen other dealers had located in the preceding six months. An opera house, "one that will put to shame some of the larger cities," was "an assured fact. . . ."

Two cigar factories, a candy store, two new sawmills, with an increased capacity of the local roller flouring mill, a sash, door, and blind factory, a new foundry, steam laundry, three new lumber yards, two additional brick yards with latest improved machinery to manufacture 7,000,000 bricks this year are a part of the great growth and development of this bustling, thriving city just east of the Cascades.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ellensburg *Capital*, April 18, May 23, June 27, 1889.

⁵² Ellensburg *Localizer*, April 4, 1891.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, February 22, 1890.

⁵⁴ Ellensburg *Capital*, June 20, 1889.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, quoting the *Portland Oregonian*.

The fire which struck with savage fury on July 4 was of undetermined origin, although the local press insisted that it was the work of incendiaries. It was not discovered until late in the night. A high wind lashed the flames and sent them roaring from one building and block to another. Water was scarce, and the fire-fighting equipment was utterly inadequate. "It was an ocean of flame which raged with unabated fury and only stopped when there was nothing left to feed upon. Fully ten blocks in the business portion were in ashes within the space of four hours."⁵⁶ The loss was estimated at \$2,000,000, and only a fraction, apparently not over twenty per cent, was covered by insurance. Perhaps a hundred and fifty persons were left homeless, many were destitute, and others had lost their employment. The immediate need was acute, but aid was sent from other towns and cities, and relief centers were quickly set up. The people met the emergency with surprisingly few complaints and made the best of the situation. Firms which saved a portion of their goods opened store in tents or makeshift shacks, the "Hotel de Ashes" announced that it served the best meals in town, and, in general, business was resumed with a minimum of delay.⁵⁷

Undoubtedly the question uppermost in the minds of many people was what effect the disaster would have on the future of Ellensburgh, upon which they had staked so much. An answer was soon given. The fire had occurred Thursday night. On Saturday evening the "Capitol Band Boys" assembled in the heart of the burned district "to show they were not dead" despite what had happened, and to add a little cheer to the situation. H. C. Walters, member of the largest real estate firm, came along and saw an "excellent opportunity to hold a mass meeting." He called the crowd to order and then asked several prominent persons present to make impromptu speeches. Each who spoke declared that he was in favor of rebuilding at once and of erecting larger, safer, fireproof structures. "All the speakers were cheered and applauded to the echo, particularly when they spoke in favor of making Ellensburgh a grander city than ever." John V. Moffitt, of Wichita, who had the street railway franchise and was building a four-story hotel, and planned an opera house, declared his determination "to proceed with all possible dispatch in completion of his several undertakings." He expressed "unbounded confidence in the undoubtedly greater future of Ellensburgh." The Honorable John A. Shoudy, founder of the city, stated that when he "first saw the site of the town, it was a much more desolate place than now, being devoid of the white inhabitants." As president of the Ellensburgh and Eastern Railroad, he

⁵⁶ Ellensburgh *Capital*, July 8, 1889. The *Capital* provided a complete detailed description of the fire. See also Lyman, *op. cit.*, I, 191-92.

⁵⁷ Ellensburgh *Capital*, July 8, 1889.

announced that the chief engineer had been instructed to proceed with the work immediately. The Honorable E. P. Cadwell, who enjoyed "the well earned reputation of having been the first non-resident capitalist to invest large sums in the building of brick blocks," and whose losses were perhaps greater than any other person's, pledged his "determination to make his future endeavors in rebuilding this city completely overshadow all his former efforts." He had "already contracted for between two and three million bricks and was only waiting for the ruins to cool before ordering men to the work of reconstruction." Referring to questions relating to the effect of the disaster upon the Ellensburg and Eastern Railroad, of which he was an attorney and chief promotor, he asked, "What effect should disaster have except to expedite work?" J. C. McCandless, "capitalist, formerly of Honolulu," and chairman of the finance committee of the Board of Trade, likewise expressed his determination to build bigger and better than before. Several others spoke, including Chairman Walters, who read telegrams from the East offering to lend money for rebuilding purposes.⁵⁸

And so, with a band concert and an enthusiastic mass meeting to start things off with a flourish, Ellensburg began to rebuild. Eastern money was available, and within a week Walters and Company had negotiated \$150,000 in loans.⁵⁹ That was only the beginning, and there were several other agents of Eastern investors in town. Excavation for new buildings began at once, and soon there were hundreds of men at work. "There is music in every lick of the trowel, in every stroke of the hammer, in ever whirr of the saw," said the *Capital*, "and Ellensburg resounds with such music. There isn't a fly on the place nor a laggard in the streets."

The "hundreds of thousands of dollars" required to pay the "industrious crowd" of carpenters, brickmakers, bricklayers, and mechanics generally was expected quickly to put money into circulation, thus making good times for all. Seven local brickyards were operating to produce the 12,000,000 bricks needed. The eighty-five brick and stone buildings planned for immediate construction were expected to cost \$750,000, while fully \$250,000 would be spent in frame buildings.⁶⁰ The *Localizer* in January of the following year asserted that instead of the 1,468 feet frontage of brick buildings before the fire, Ellensburg already had 3,650 feet. Nearly every one of the buildings, including ninety-two stores and several hundred offices and rooms, was said to be completed and occupied.⁶¹ Two

⁵⁸ Ellensburg *Capital*, July 18, 1889.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, July 18, 1889.

⁶⁰ This was the *Capital's* count of the number of buildings under construction by September 26, 1889.

⁶¹ Ellensburg *Localizer*, January 18, 1890.

years after the fire the *Register* boasted that "Ellensburg has more brick buildings for its age and size than any other city in the United States," a claim which the present writer is not inclined to dispute!⁶²

As for real estate, the *Capital* (whose editor was perhaps not entirely disinterested) noted that "it is a little more active and firmer than before the fire. There is also more inquiry from abroad, and the tendency is to advance."⁶³ Walters and Company offered lots inside the burned area at \$40 to \$300 per front foot. In the outlying sections of the city, realtors opened at least four new additions within two weeks after the fire. Several others were opened later in the year.

All this activity after the fire was cited as proof that Ellensburg was not only enterprising, but also sound economically. For instance, the Portland *West Shore* was quoted as saying:

Great as this calamity is, it has served but to demonstrate the permanence of and stability of the city as a large commercial center. Had Ellensburg been a boom town, with its values purely speculative and without actual resources commensurate with its growth, such a blow would have been fatal.⁶⁴

What those in Ellensburg and those outside failed to see, however, was that the adverse effects of excessive speculation are not always recognized immediately. The reconstruction effort, financed by outside money, developed sufficient momentum to keep things in motion for a time. Unfortunately there was soon to be a dead stop.

Although in the months immediately after the fire, less attention was given to Ellensburg's industrial potentialities, interest continued and was again at fever heat by the first months of 1891. In February appeared a statement that "one of the largest iron discoveries ever made in the Northwest is the Iron Mountain district, Kittitas County, three miles from the line of the Northern Pacific railroad and 20 miles from Ellensburg." It was described as "a veritable mountain of iron so admirably situated for working that thousands of tons can be taken out with little trouble or expense."⁶⁵

This new development was taken as a certain indication that Ellensburg would become the "Iron City," the "Pittsburgh of the West." The *Localizer* predicted that steel vessels would be "all the rage in the near future" and Puget Sound would become the place for building them. Kittitas ores were particularly well adapted for making such steel as these vessels required. The prediction concluded by saying: "The time is not far distant when Ellensburg will be

⁶² *Washington State Register*, October 10, 1891.

⁶³ *Ellensburg Capital*, July 25, 1889.

⁶⁴ Quoted in the *Ellensburg Capital*, August 1, 1889.

⁶⁵ Quoted from the *Seattle Press* by the *Ellensburg Capital*, February 5, 1891.

one of the greatest manufacturing districts of this state."⁶⁶ The *Register* was not willing to share honors with rival cities nor to recognize the limitations of state boundaries. It went the whole way by declaring, "Ellensburg will be the principal manufacturing city in the Pacific Northwest. This fact is spreading throughout the east with astonishing rapidity, and the near future will see this assertion verified."⁶⁷ A Mr. McIntosh of Seattle, "intimately acquainted" with Hemphill and Company, large Pittsburgh iron manufacturers, came to the city and expressed himself as "very much interested." "The beauty of the situation," he said, "is that all of the Ellensburg materials are easily available."⁶⁸ By May, 1891, the *Register* was almost lyrical in its enthusiasm.

The development of a practically unlimited supply of carbonate of lime six miles south of Ellensburg has set the seal of absolute ultimate success upon the Kittitas county iron mining proposition. We of Ellensburg today, may be too slow, careless or faint hearted to grasp the advantage, never-the-less we have in one mountain, practically at our very doors, iron, lime and fire clay in quantity and quality equal to the speedy up-building of a manufacturing city, and if we do not reap the harvest the fault will be ours.⁶⁹

"Inexhaustible supplies of coking coal . . . and unlimited supplies of charcoal timber" were added a little later to the list of indispensable materials at hand.⁷⁰ When unrestrained optimism seemed insufficient to stir the people to action, the *Register*, in August, tried another tack.

There is no use denying the very plain fact now staring us in the face, that without the establishment of manufactures here to consume our abundant raw materials and give practical employment to labor, Ellensburg's real values can never advance beyond their present figures. . . . With a little effort by everybody interested we can make this city 'bulge out' with prosperity but if we sit idly wishing for 'somebody or something' to come along and lift us out of the ruts of adversity we will be stuck in the mud too deep for rescue.⁷¹

The writer added that "we certainly as a community are drifting downstream at great rate, and unless we get a vigorous move on ourselves we will never get back to our enviable position again."

⁶⁶ Quoted from the *Seattle Press* by the *Ellensburg Capital*, February 5, 1891.

⁶⁷ *Washington State Register*, March 21, 1891.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, May 2, 1891.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, August 8, 1891. Favorable reports from the Menastash region near Ellensburg gave "every reason to believe" it "will yet equal the Roslyn in coal output."

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, August 1, 1891.

The author of the above undoubtedly had in mind a specific undertaking launched some months before and now languishing for lack of financial support. It was in December, 1890, that the Ellensburg Improvement Company was organized and incorporated, with a capital stock of \$1,000,000. Its declared object was to engage in general manufacturing, building, milling, and mining.⁷² The plan was to secure by donation iron and lime mines, city lots, and outside acreage. When enough property should be accumulated in this manner, the real estate would be sold, mortgaged, or otherwise disposed of to raise a subsidy fund which should be used for setting up iron works and encouraging manufacturing generally. The original goal was 300 acres of land and 250 city lots.⁷³

By the middle of January, 1891, the *Register* noted that over 350 acres and 160 lots had been secured, adding that "if the property owners not represented respond with equal liberality, we can make Ellensburg a city of forty thousand inhabitants in less than three years."⁷⁴ Land, money, notes, building material, and labor could all be used, it was said, to promote this plan for a "grand army of dinner buckets." A month later the donations had reached 600 acres and 200 lots, with three conditional gifts amounting to 1,150 acres if the iron works should be placed in prescribed localities. In all it was estimated that "\$200,000 worth of real property" was available for the purpose designed.⁷⁵ To secure that sum by the sale of mortgage bonds, however, the amount of property donations would have to be doubled.⁷⁶

The *Capital* then announced how the \$200,000 should be distributed: for a pig iron furnace, \$50,000; for iron and steel works, including car, pipe, nut, bolt, agricultural implements, cutlery, engine, boiler and wire works, \$50,000; for woolen mills, \$10,000; for leather boots and shoes, \$10,000; for linseed oil and coke [cake?] mill, \$10,000; for beet sugar, \$10,000; for straw and paper goods, \$5,000; for a starch factory, \$2,500; for a creamery, \$2,500; for irrigation, artesian wells, and miscellaneous industries, \$50,000.

With these industries successfully established at Ellensburg, every acre or lot of land within five miles of the business center will have doubled five times in value and every line of business or industrial enterprise throughout the county will have been quickened and prospered beyond present conception. Five times \$400,000, the present value of the subsidy sought to be raised, equals \$2,000,000, the then worth of the Improvement Company's property. Subtracting \$200,000, face value of the sub-

⁷² *Washington State Register*, December 20, 1890, January 3, 1891.

⁷³ *Ibid.*; *Ellensburg Localizer*, January 11, 1891.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ellensburg Capital*, February 19, 1891.

⁷⁶ Apparently the original plan had been expanded considerably.

sidy gift in bonds from \$2,000,000, the ultimate value of the subsidy in lands, there will remain \$1,800,000 in value for division among holders of the Improvement Company's stock, when the outlined undertakings have been successfully carried out.⁷⁷

With such a glowing prospect before them, and apparently without waiting for the entire subsidy in lands, the Improvement Company erected a building for the iron works south of the stockyards and near the Northern Pacific tracks. The structure, while "not of immense magnitude," was described as "of such substantial character as to plainly indicate a thorough determination to carry this project to successful completion."⁷⁸ A brick kiln for the manufacture of fire brick to line the furnace was about half completed by the latter part of May, and "a huge iron ore crusher" had been placed in position. "Almost all of the machinery necessary to iron and brick manufacture" was reported on the ground.⁷⁹ "A slight effort upon the part of all the business men and property owners in this city will enable the manufacture of pig iron in this city within four months from date," promised the *Register*.⁸⁰

The same paper warned in July, however, that the project was encountering financial difficulties. "When we consider the limited number of people who have contributed toward it, it seems a little less than a miracle that the work has not been cut short long ago."⁸¹ The disagreeable fact was that hard times were settling down over Ellensburg. How much money was actually secured from the sale or mortgage of the subsidy lands is not indicated, but apparently not nearly enough. Property values were declining very rapidly, and probably those lands had never been worth anything like the estimated value.

There was one other possibility, however. In experimenting with clays for making fire brick to line the iron furnace, it was discovered that a combination of the clays found near the city with the graphite from the Improvement Company's mine near Cle Elum produced a fire brick which appeared to be of very high quality. Fire brick production on a large scale might produce sufficient revenue to complete the iron furnace and thus bring Ellensburg into her own.⁸² If only enough funds could be secured to pay the men, the first kiln of 50,000 fire bricks could be placed on the market. "It would be a burning shame," said the *Register*, "to have this work stop now through lack of considerably less than a thousand dollars

⁷⁷ Ellensburg *Capital*, February 19, 1891.

⁷⁸ *Washington State Register*, March 28, 1891. The building was 40 by 80 feet. Ellensburg *Localizer*, April 4, 1891.

⁷⁹ *Washington State Register*, May 23, May 30, 1891.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, May 30, 1891.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, July 4, 1891.

⁸² *Ibid.*, June 6, July 4, July 11, 1891.

cash a month, and it is hoped that every citizen . . . will take a lively interest in this matter."⁸³

Even this relatively small amount was apparently not forthcoming, for there is very little mention of either the fire brick project or the iron works after August, 1891. The next spring the *Localizer* reiterated the claim that "no better iron mines exist in America," and added sadly, "why the ore is not utilized passes all comprehension."⁸⁴

Perhaps the answer is to be found in a recent report issued by the Division of Geology in the Department of Conservation and Development of the State of Washington. The conclusion would appear to be that, while there is undoubtedly iron ore in the Blewett-Cle Elum zone in Chelan and Kittitas counties, there is a question as to whether a commercial iron or steel product can be made from them. Assuming that such production would be feasible, the issue as to whether or not the deposits are "large enough to support an industry for a number of years," is still open to question.⁸⁵ In any case, the dream of the boosters of 1889 seems indefinitely postponed. There is no immediate prospect that Ellensburgh will become the "Pittsburgh of the West."

The effort to bring prosperity by these heroic methods comprised the last phase of the Ellensburgh boom of 1889-1891. To be sure, there were reports of new gold finds in the Menastash area and along Swauk Creek,⁸⁶ and there was even some hope that the graphite deposits would be of commercial value.

With a mountain of this useful mineral easily accessible, and surrounded with forests of the finest cedar for the wood of pencils why may not the citizens of Ellensburgh expect the establishment of a pencil manufactory that shall be able to compete, because of reduced cost of manufacture, with the great Faber and Dixon factories.⁸⁷

Nothing came of that new idea, however.

The people of Ellensburgh were in no position to consider any more industrial projects. The newspapers after the summer of 1891 contain many references to business failures and hard times. Real estate values collapsed. The lists of tax delinquent properties at the close of the year filled two full newspaper pages of fine print. Many hundreds of lots and scores of blocks were included. The Ellensburgh Improvement Company led the list of those who either could

⁸³ *Washington State Register*, July 11, 1891.

⁸⁴ *Ellensburgh Localizer*, April 2, 1892.

⁸⁵ W. A. Broughton, *Economic Aspects of the Blewett-Cle Elum Iron Ore Zone, Chelan and Kittitas Counties, Washington* (Olympia: State Printing Plant, 1944).

⁸⁶ *Washington State Register*, August 8, 1891. The columns of the newspapers in the late summer contain many notices of finds in these two areas.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, October 10, 1891, quoting the *Chicago Graphic*.

not pay taxes or preferred to lose their property rather than pay them. The promoters of new additions to the city were the next largest holders, but the list of "unknown" owners was the longest of all,⁸⁸ indicating the low level to which Ellensburg real estate had fallen.

The older inhabitants of Ellensburg are not in agreement as to which factors were most responsible for the collapse. That the fire and the attempt to rebuild on a larger scale with borrowed money were partly responsible can hardly be doubted. These might have been weathered, however, had the financial structure been sound otherwise. But the boom, especially as seen in the fantastic real estate development, was an abnormal thing. Even had the capital come, the paper railroads become realities, and the iron works been developed, the twenty-five additions to the city would hardly have been justified. When the schemes of promoters failed to materialize, deflation was inevitable.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Washington State Register*, April 21, 1894. The properties delinquent in 1891 were to be sold by the city for taxes in 1894, but a technicality caused a delay.

⁸⁹ In this study, the various irrigation schemes have been omitted for reason of lack of space. They seem to have attracted relatively little attention during the years between 1888 and 1891. The same can be said for the founding of the Washington State Normal School, the present Central Washington College of Education, now regarded as one of the greatest economic assets of Ellensburg. The people, if the press is any criterion, simply were not interested in a normal school which was regarded as a kind of consolation prize for loss of the capital.