

WALLA WALLA TRACTOR SHOW OF 1919

The First World War and its attendant agricultural boom accelerated the rise of power farming, the transition from horse and mule power to combustion engine tractors. Power farming was regarded as a way to increase agricultural production, and therefor to support the war effort. Not only were farmers eager to increase their farm output for financial reasons, but doing so was regarded by many as being patriotic. Power-farming demonstrations, or tractor shows were happening across the nation and in Europe to educate farmers on the many different types and makes of power-farming equipment.

In the Spring of 1919, the “greatest and most comprehensive practical demonstration of tractors, tractor accessories and power farming machinery” in the West was held here on the then Harve Yenny Farm. Fields on both sides of Russell Creek Road were rumbling with demonstrations on hillsides as well as level ground. Domestic innovations such as power washing machines, cream separators, and vacuum cleaners were showcased in huge circus tents. Implement dealers came from all over the West and Midwest, shipping their tractors and equipment by train. Thousands of visitors from as far away as Montana arrived by train, cars and even by horseback. The number of visitors to Walla Walla on April 19, 20, and 21, is unknown, but it was estimated that the attendance to the expo was 49,000 over the three days.

Housing, feeding, and transporting this number of guests was a Herculean feat, but Walla Walla pulled it off with less than 4 months to plan, thanks to the entire town pitching in to “do their share.” Even evening entertainment was covered, including the Blue Mountain Music Festival, a world-class opera series featuring renowned singers and a 350-member chorus of local voices, an amazing event on its own.

More information about the Tractor Show as well as the 2019 Centennial Celebration hosted by Blue Mountain Land Trust and McKinney Farms can be found in the book “The 1919 Walla Walla Tractor Show,” by Linda Herbert and produced by the Blue Mountain Land Trust. You can also watch the documentary by the same name on YouTube to enjoy more photos and stories about the event.

