

The Ballagh Rails

By Lyndon N. Irwin

Druggist Wilfred Thomas Ballagh and wife Beulah (Mason) lived in one of Nevada's larger historic homes at 810 West Cherry Street. W. T. Ballagh was born to Isaac and Susan (Carson) Ballagh in Port Hope, Ontario, Canada, on September 7, 1870. By 1880, the family had moved to St. Clair County, Missouri, where his parents operated a restaurant on 4th Street in Appleton City. He had two younger sisters, Ida May and Susan Maude. W. T.'s father, Isaac Ballagh, died in Appleton City in 1885. For some reason, he was buried at Deepwood Cemetery in Nevada (either that or they buried him at Appleton City and later moved him to Deepwood).

By 1889, W. T. was working in Nevada at a pharmacy and in 1892 had gone to Sedalia so he could take the state pharmacy exam to become a registered pharmacist. The exam was most challenging because out of the 30 men who took it, only six passed. W. T. Ballagh was one of those six, and he continued to live in Nevada to begin his pharmacy career. He also worked briefly as a pharmacist in Lamar. In August 1895, his mother and sisters joined him when they moved to Nevada from Appleton City.

In the early years in Nevada, Ballagh kept big dogs. For example, he sold an expensive dog in the fall of 1897. He sold his English Mastiff that was named Lord Chancellor for \$100.00. One of his best was a Great Dane named Sultan. In fact, in 1898, Sultan's half-brother named Leo, had sold for \$4,000 in Kansas City. Sultan was a registered purebred Great Dane and was a golden brindle. The dog weighed 150 pounds and was 34 inches tall. However, on

September 22, 1898, Sultan was shot and killed in Nevada. Newspapers were at a loss to explain why someone would want to kill Sultan.

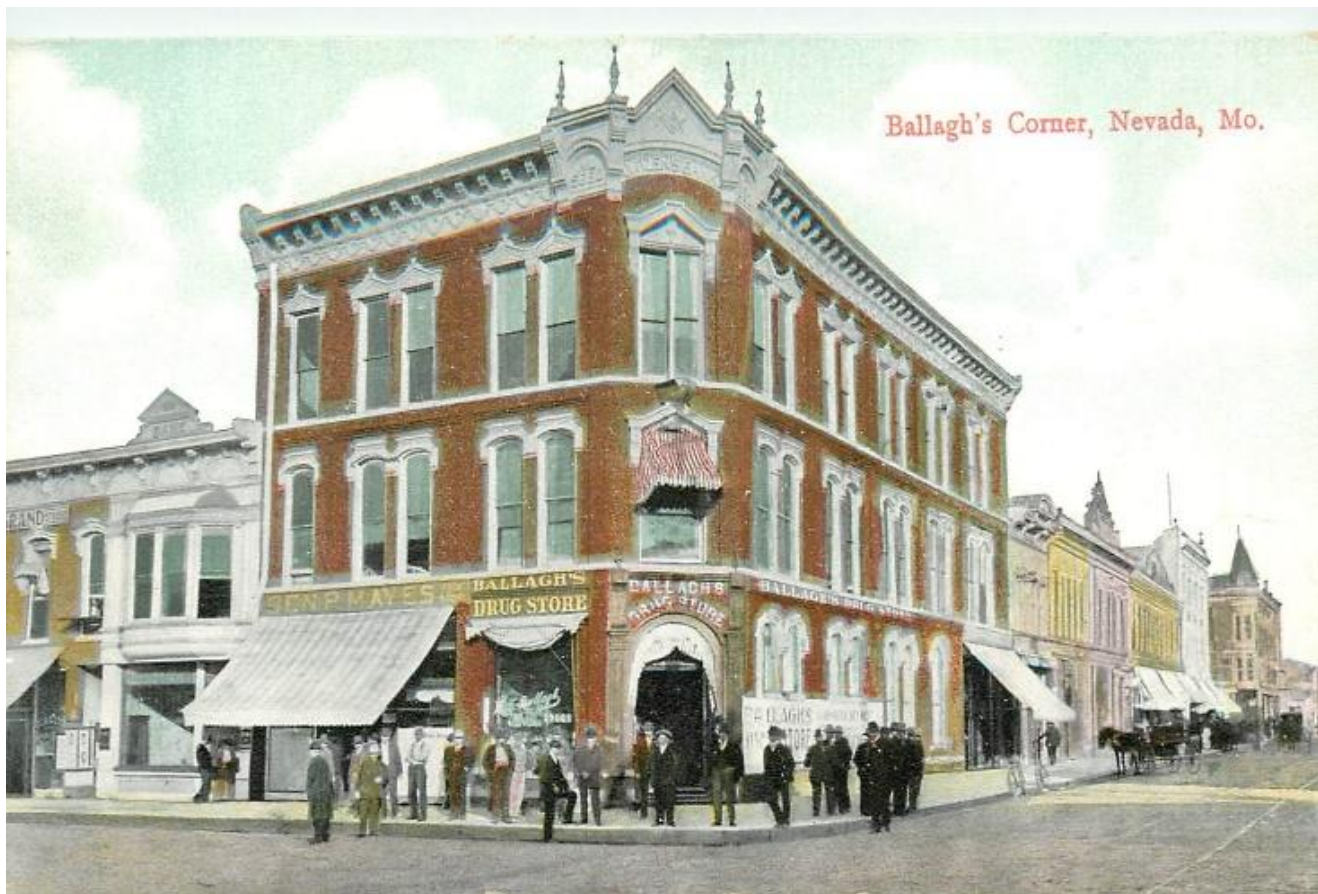
By the time the 1900 census was taken, W. T. Ballagh was living at the large columned house at 810 West Cherry. Living with him were his mother and his sister, Ida. Later that year, W. T. married Miss Beulah Mason whom he had been dating for several years. Beulah was the daughter of William A. and Louisa (Briggs) Mason. The Masons had lived in Vandalia, Audrain County, MO but had come to Nevada about the time the Ballagh's did. The 1900 census shows that they lived at 310 S. Washington Street.



EGGS FOR HATCHING.
S. C. White Leghorns winter layers. You know the hen that lays is the hen that pays. Our White Leghorns are bred to lay. Pure Young's strain, the most select and highest priced White Leghorns bred. If you have a mixed flock and wish to increase your egg production try a few settings. If you wish to add another breed try our White Leghorns.
Price of eggs, 15, \$1.50. 30, \$2.50. 100, \$5.
W. T. BALLAGH,
Nevada, Mo.

The Southwest Missouri Poultry Show was held in Nevada for several days in January 1900. "Competent" judges were hired to judge the many entries. It was noted that W. T. Ballagh exhibited the finest pit game chickens in Southwest Missouri. In fact, he won all of the prizes offered. Two evenings during the poultry show, game chickens were put in a pit for cock fighting. Although the poultry show was free, an admission of ten cents was charged to attend the cock fights that began at 7:00 p.m. Ballagh later showed other poultry. His Buff Plymouth Rock chickens were winning in 1902 and by 1905, he was selling high quality White Pekin ducks.

W. T. Ballagh's drug store soon became the largest and most modern in Nevada. It was located at the southeast corner of the square. The store featured a complete line of drugs and toiletries. It also featured domestic and imported cigars. By the fall of 1900, Ballagh had a first for Nevada. He had just received a clock that never ran down



and did not depend on a human to wind it. The local newspaper expressed skepticism about this invention for Nevada because this clock was run by electricity! It was noted that the clock was always correct. The clock was being kept at the drug store.

The Ballagh family was involved in one of the more well-known tragedies in 1904. On October 9, 1904, Mrs. Beulah Ballagh and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Mason boarded a Missouri Pacific train bound for Pleasant Hill and then on to St. Louis so they could attend the fabulous Louisiana Purchase Exposition, more commonly referred to as the St. Louis World's Fair. Around 4 a.m., the next morning that passenger train crashed head on with a west bound freight that should not have been on the tracks. The wreck occurred east of Warrensburg and there were 29 people killed, including five from Vernon County. Mrs. Ballagh was among those who were injured. Most of the injured were transported to a railroad hospital in Sedalia. Mrs. Ballagh and her parents chose, however, to seek private medical attention and hired a carriage to transport her to Warrensburg.

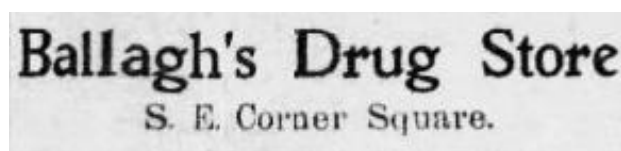
Before long, they were back home in Nevada, resting from the excitement.

On December 8, 1904, Mrs. Susan Ballagh died at her son's home on West Cherry. She had come down with pneumonia and only survived for two days. Services were at the family home, and she was buried beside her husband, Isaac, in Deepwood.

Miss Ida Ballagh, the maiden sister of Mr. Ballagh, continued to live with them at the Cherry Street home. Ida died May 27, 1906, after a lingering illness. Her funeral was held at the home and she was buried near her parents in Deepwood Cemetery.

Not only did Ballagh raise good dogs and chickens, he was also a breeder of some of the best Jersey cattle. A State Dairy Commissioner came to Nevada in the summer of 1906 to conduct a seminar. He rated some of the Ballagh cows and also tested their butterfat content. One cow's milk tested 9.6% butterfat which was something to brag about. The tester told Ballagh that the highest butterfat content he

had ever found in Missouri was 10%, so the Ballagh cow was indeed a good one.



The Ballagh Drug store windows sometimes displayed items of interest. The "biggest coon ever in town" was on display, hanging in the show window of Ballagh's drug store in November 1906. The night before, two clerks at Ballagh's store had been hunting in the Big Drywood bottoms west of Nevada. Folks were so impressed by the size of the raccoon, that it was hung in Ballagh's window the next day for everyone to see.

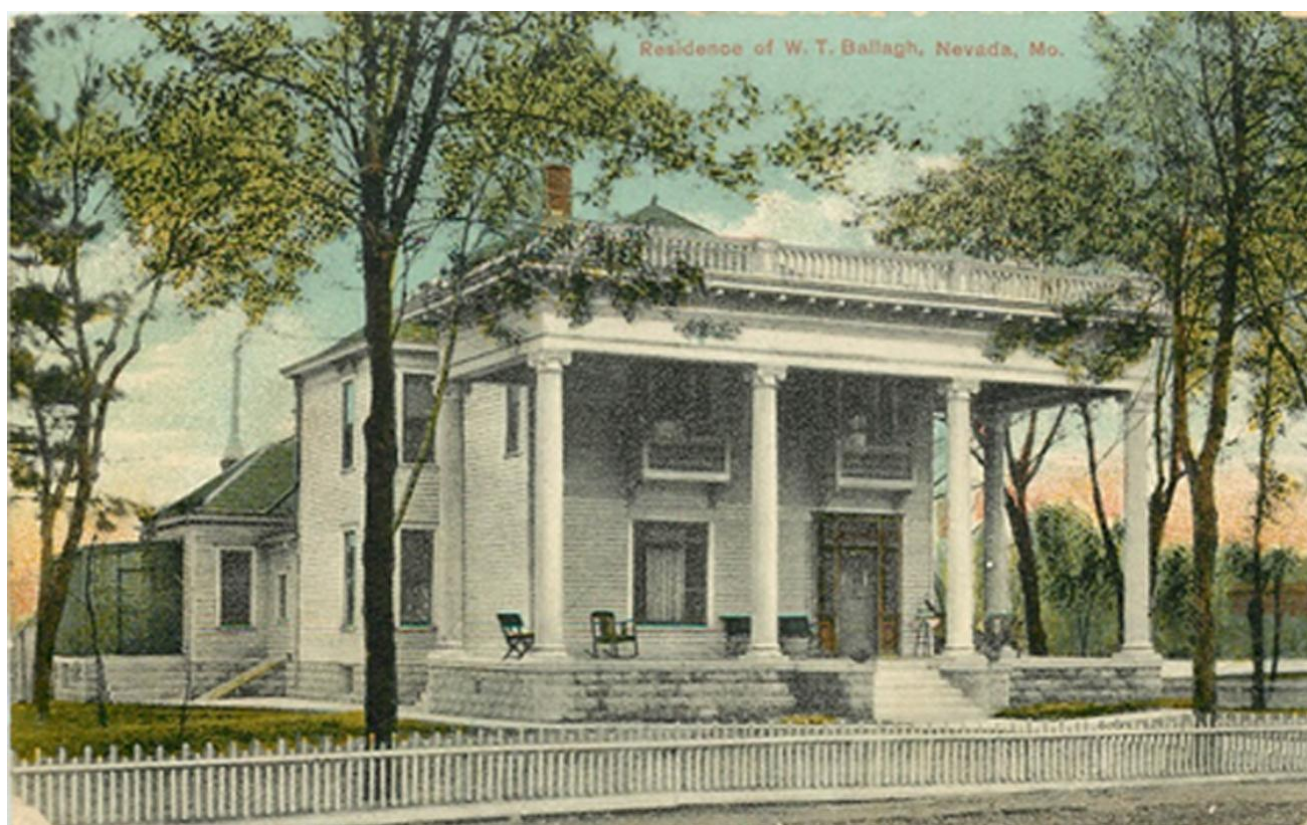
Ballagh was also instrumental in offering a large line of postcards. Postcards featuring photos or colored graphics on one side were allowed by the postal service starting in about 1908. Many of the postcards sold at the store were of Nevada attractions. Surprisingly, most of them were printed in Germany. The Ballagh drug store also had another first for the town. The

store featured a Soda Fountain that offered non-alcoholic drinks and ice cream. Needless to say, the Ballagh Drug Store was a popular place.

W. T. Ballagh was extremely active in community affairs. He was a member of most of the fraternal organizations in Nevada. At one time, he was the president of the Nevada School Board, even though he and Beulah never had any children. On October 7, 1917, he finally became a naturalized citizen of the United States.

In August 1930, in the early days of the great depression, Mr. Ballagh sold his drug store to Weaver Miller. Ballagh had been in the drugstore business for 41 years and told the newspaper that he intended to take an extended vacation before announcing his plans. But he and Beulah planned to remain in Nevada.

By February 1937, Ballagh must have been missing drugstore work because he purchased the Wardin Drug Store on the north side of the square at 108 West Walnut in Nevada. He took immediate possession and hired a staff and redecorated. He also hired the pharmacist



away from the Miller store. Ballagh hoped to avoid the day-to-day work that he had retired from.

Although the Ballagh's did not have any children, they did have a well-known parrot for 35 years. In about 1907, they purchased "Billy Parrot" at six weeks of age. The parrot got a great deal of attention with Mr. and Mrs. Ballagh teaching him to talk, laugh and interact. The Ballagh's even credited Billy Parrot with averting a robbery in 1935. The home was broken into but it appears that the burglar left quickly before much could be taken. The Ballagh's were of the opinion that Billy Parrot probably started talking in one of his best voices, scaring off the burglar. School children sometimes stopped in to visit Billy Parrot. In June 1942, Billy Parrot died and his passing made newspaper headlines in the area. He was buried on a Sunday morning with proper respect. Some have said that Billy Parrot is buried between W. T. and Beulah Ballagh in Deepwood Cemetery, but that is difficult to confirm.

Mr. Ballagh continued to operate his second drug store on the north side of the square right up until his death. He and Beulah still lived at the large house at 810 West Cherry until he died of heart disease on February 5, 1948. Services were held at the Hays Funeral Home which was just a few blocks east of their house. He was buried in the family plot at Deepwood. His wife sold the drug store to Leonard Brown of Mexico, MO almost immediately after his death. Before long, Beulah moved out of the big house because the 1950 census showed her living alone at 319 West Arch. She died in 1962.

The Rails

The beautiful wood house at 810 West Cherry Street that the Ballagh's called home for so many years still stands. The Ballagh store sold colored postcards of many of the larger homes in Nevada. This included at least two of their house. One of the features of the house is a high porch with tall white columns. Above the porch were attractive wooden porch rails that



can be seen in a copy of the 1912 postcard (on page 3) sold at the Ballagh Drugstore.

On February 24, 2024, a large auction was held at the 810 West Cherry home since the property had again been sold. Many antiques were featured. But one of the interesting items that did not get much attention was the porch rails that had been removed from the upper porch of the old house.

They sold for a nominal price to Lyndon Irwin (the author of this article). The rails were loaded and hauled to Bronaugh, where over the next five months, the spindles were cleaned, sealed, painted and then remounted. Once that big job had been completed, they were placed as porch railings on another pre-1900 Vernon County home just southwest of Bronaugh.

This Bronaugh house had been totally restored in 2020 and included a new porch that lacked nice rails. So, the Ballagh rails now live on in

Vernon County as a part of that house on Yater Road.

Interestingly, the Missouri Pacific train line that carried the train to Nevada where Mrs. Ballagh boarded in Nevada in 1904 runs through the farm where this house is located. The house is also just a half mile from Worsley Cemetery where seven victims (four died, three injured) of that 1904 St. Louis World's Fair train wreck can be found.

Area residents will remember the 3-story Ballagh Drug Store building as the Vieth's Café building with the corner entrance door. The building deteriorated and was removed in 2020, taking with it another part of the colorful history of the Nevada Square. The Society extends its appreciation to member and author Lyndon Irwin for rescuing another part of early-Vernon County history and researching and sharing copies from his extensive postcard collection, photos, and graphics for the story of the Ballagh family and the Ballagh Rails!
Editor.

