

“A Glorious Future”: Renton High School’s First 20 Years

By Elizabeth P. Stewart

When the new Renton High School opened its doors for students in 1911, the biggest challenge was getting students to stay in school long enough to graduate. By 1930, however, students were looking toward college and helping pass a bond issue for a state-of-the-art school building. In Renton High’s first twenty years the enthusiasm and dedication of teachers, students, and parents made secondary education a success and set the school on its path into the future.

The very concept of continuing education past eighth grade needed selling to many families accustomed to sending their youth out to work. In 1907 thirty students entered what would become the first graduating class of

the Renton High School. Class Secretary Allie Grady remembered that “there had been many [high school] classes which had preceded us but none which had completed the four-year course.”¹ By 1909 only four students remained; the rest had gone on to jobs, other schools, or family responsibilities. The first high school graduating class—the Class of 1911—consisted of those four students: Class President Vane N. Marlowe, Class Secretary Allie Grady, Treasurer Susie A. Wood, and poor William X. Norton, the only senior without a title.²



First freshman class at Renton High School, 1911. (#1986.045.2229)



President's Message

By Sandra Meyer, President

Renton Historical Quarterly

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Renton History Museum
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Renton, WA 98057
Phone: 425-255-2330
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www.rentonhistorymuseum.org

Hours:

Tuesday - Saturday 10:00am - 4:00pm

**Admission: \$3 for adults
\$1 for children**

Always free to members and to the general public on the first Wednesday and third Saturday of the month.

Board Meetings: Please call the museum for time and location.



What two words exemplify the essence of the Society's work since my last report? I would, without a doubt, say we have been "very active." We are becoming a much more professional, focused, deliberate, and engaged board. To highlight these points, let me outline what we have done and what we are doing.

To assure that the Society has trustees that have complementary skills, we are using a strategic matrix to evaluate board needs and experience. We are filling board positions based upon the areas needing specific skill sets. We are currently in need of members with more technology skills so we can explore

ways to add greater interactivity in the gallery and on our web site. Other board skills are also needed, but this is just one example.

I mentioned in my last report that we are undergoing a capital campaign readiness program. The Society hired The Collins Group to guide us through this exciting and unique process. We have 8 – 10 people on the committee whose short-term assignment is to interview residents from the diverse communities living in Renton regarding the Museum's Master Plan and the Museum's role in the community. Among others, we are very blessed to have Councilmember Greg Taylor and former Renton Fire Chief David Daniels serve on this committee. This work should be completed by next April.

In terms of outreach, the Society and Museum staff participated in select neighborhood picnics including Talbot Hill and Liberty Ridge. We twice staffed a community booth at the Farmers Market in the summer, as well as the Business Expo.

The biggest event this year was clearly the annual Renton Historical Society fundraiser, held on October 6th. It was magic. We had comedian John Keister emcee the event while providing comedic entertainment. The Lindbergh High School Jazz Choir was also very inspirational. Everyone had a fabulous time. The silent auction had over 80 items available for bidding and we raised twice as much money as we have done in the past. This would not have been possible without the hard work of the Fundraising Committee, Museum staff, and student volunteers that included the Future Business Leaders of America and the Renton Youth Council. Trustee Larry Sleeth and Councilmember Don Persson volunteered to prepare our delicious meal that evening. Thanks to everyone who attended!

Finally, I want to thank outgoing trustee Kevin McQuiller for his many years of service on the Board. In addition, our thanks to Barbara Whitehurst who will be stepping down as a Board member, but will continue to serve on the Fundraising Committee.

Renton Museum Report

By Elizabeth P. Stewart, Director

If you haven't had a chance to see our latest temporary exhibit, *Among Friends: Renton High's 100 Years*, I hope you'll come in soon and see it. The Renton



High Centennial Committee, co-chaired by Terri Briere and Roxanne Hanson, helped us reach out to alums, and Renton High Principal Damien Pattenaude and teacher Derek Smith helped us involve students. The result is a very personal look at Renton High from 1910 to the present, created by alums, teachers, and students, with a little help from Museum staff.

The exhibit explores the origin of the "Indians" as a team name, the changes to the high school building over time, and the pride Renton High Schoolers have taken in their sports

teams, extracurricular activities, and academics. Favorite objects include a handmade majorette's uniform and a letter sweater from the 1960s, a scrapbook about the 1953 championship basketball team, and a choir dress from the 1970s.

The exhibit focuses on 100 years of Renton High history, but the editorial staff of the student magazine, *The ARROW*, brought the exhibit into the present and the future, by sharing a series of very personal essays about "My Beautiful Object." These essays provide a glimpse into the lives of Renton youth that is sometimes painful, but always inspiring. Our visitors have been very impressed with these students' ability to convey their experiences, so that the generations can better understand one another.

The research for this quarter's feature article reminded me that the generations of students may not be so very different after all. During Renton High's first twenty years, many teenagers found themselves distracted from completing their diplomas by many demands on their time and attention. In the 1890s and 1910s families routinely took their youth out of school after eighth grade; many needed the extra income of teen-aged boys or help in the family business or on the family farm. Teen-aged girls might be asked to help with child care, or go out to work to supplement the family's income. Girls and boys were distracted by death, disease, poverty, and sometimes by inappropriate friends. They heard the same arguments for education that students hear today, if in more antiquated phrasing: "Every day spent in school now will someday mean an increase in pay," or "To be competitive, one must finish school."

Many of us don't often get the opportunity to interact with people who are different from ourselves, and we hope that *Among Friends* points out that, young or older, we're not all that different after all. The more we share our experiences and understand one another, the stronger we are as a community. History is all about striving toward understanding, after all.

Liz Stewart

Wanted: Museum Greeters!

For museum-goers, greeters are the welcoming face of the Museum. Greeters answer their questions and generally make them feel excited about Renton's heritage. The Museum is desperately in need of enthusiastic volunteers who can commit to work a three-hour shift one Saturday a month, from 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. or 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. No knowledge of Renton history necessary; training is provided. If you're interested, please contact Dorota Rahn at drahn@rentonwa.gov or 425-255-2330.

New Memberships

Melinda & Jonathan Woodard family
Charlotte Cline
James & Donna Lunceford
Olympe "Babe" Toman
Judy Richards Ford
Ray Owens



Are you missing something?

In our Lost and Found:

- (1) Dark green jacket, zip closure - Left on coat rack for several months.
- (2) Cuff link with "pearl" white inset surrounded by tiny diamond-like stones.

"A Glorious Future" continued from page 1

Students faced many demands that might pull them away from school. Many families needed the extra income that a teen-aged son might bring in, or the childcare or domestic wages from a teen-aged daughter. As late as 1928, the drop-out rate at Renton High was still 50%.³ Before 1930 teachers, administrators, and students constantly reminded parents about the usefulness of a high school education. In the 1912 yearbook, student Lucile Smith observed that, "Success in life and wider influence is more certain to those who take the work thro[ugh] the high school than to those who stop at the end of the common school."⁴

"Education does increase salary," a 1925 student editorial insisted. "If children graduating from grammar school, who are not thinking of going on to high school, would only realize how much they are deducting from their salary in later life they would continue to go through High School."⁵ The message resonated with some students, who managed to hold down jobs and earn their high school diplomas. In 1929 Renton High News cited the number of juniors and seniors who were partially or totally self-supporting, and listed their names. All the senior boys had jobs, ranging from grocery clerks to restaurant dishwashers to one who played in an orchestra.⁶

As the years went on, the Renton High community focused on its positive accomplishments. In 1911 School Superintendent V. W. Talbot observed that "practically speaking, the present form of school has only been organized two years; and when we consider what has been accomplished in that short space, it gives us precedent to anticipate a glorious future." As early as 1911 the senior class began to develop a high school identity, choosing their own colors (lavender and cream) and wearing class pins. Students formed a literary society and a football team.⁷



The new Renton High School, 1911 (#2010.038.002)



Renton High School Orchestra, 1912-1913. (#1980.079.1114)



Championship basketball teams of 1925: Boys, Girls, and “Midgets.” (#1999.060.5047)

Every achievement became a point of pride. In 1907 the Renton Mine Association donated its entire collection of books to serve as the core of the high school library; by 1925 the school library had 750 volumes.⁸ In 1913 Principal George W. Beanblossom organized a school band. In 1923 Renton High published its first school newspaper, and by 1925 the school regularly held a senior ball and a junior prom.

But Renton High School really came into its own with the triumphs of its early sports teams. The baseball team was awarded a large trophy after winning the King County championship three years—1921, 1922, and 1925. The Renton High School girls’ basketball team won the county championship a stunning six years in a row before the King County Interscholastic Association decided in December 1925 to bar interscholastic sports for girls altogether, because the girls had become “too intent on winning.”⁹

As Renton High built its own community and identity, teachers and students were not shy about asking the rest of the city for help. The school newspaper reminded students about every school election, bond issue, and levy, and exhorted them to get their parents to vote. Year after year, the Renton High School newspaper covered every significant election. In a 1924 piece titled, “As Our City Grows So Must Our Schools, As Our Schools Improve So Will Our City,” the student editorialist wrote that “if Renton high school students are informed on these matters and do what they can to spread their information... the welfare of the school will be pretty well assured for another year.”¹⁰

By 1930 Renton High School was solidly established. Student editorials no longer focused on the need to complete high school; now they explained why students should aim for college. Most importantly, students, teachers, and administrators were ready to make the case to the community for a new state-of-the-art high school building. Six hundred pupils now crammed into a school built for four hundred. Sports teams' successes mandated a better gymnasium, they argued, and the size of the student body necessitated an auditorium and more classrooms. Science teachers needed updated labs and equipment, and a larger library was necessary to accommodate the growing collection of books.¹¹

Students and teachers asked voters to support a \$200,000 bond issue for the new school, and when they went to the polls in December 1930 910 voters out of 918 supported the bond. The student newspaper gleefully reported the results of the bond issue: "Everyone deserves credit for his part in making the new school possible, the faculty and students for their splendid cooperation, the school administration, and above all, the voters for the dominant part which was theirs!"¹² In its first twenty years, Renton High School had grown from a student body of forty-one to 600, from an 80% drop-out rate to students aspiring to college, with a new building promised.

- 1 Allie Grady, "Senior Class History," Duwamish (Renton: Students of the Renton High School, June 1911), 35.
- 2 "First Graduating Class of the Renton High School," Duwamish (Renton: Students of the Renton High School, June 1911), 31; Allie Grady, "Senior Class History," Duwamish, 37.
- 3 "Senior Class Reduced By Sixty-Three Since 1924," Renton High News, 22 May 1928, p.1.
- 4 Lucile Smith, "Benefits of a High School Education as Observed by a Freshman Girl," Duwamish (Renton: Students of Renton High School, 1912), 22.
- 5 Editorial, "Education Increases Salary," Renton Hi News, 31 March 1925, p.2.
- 6 "Boys Lead Girls As Breadwinners," Renton High News, 12 February 1929, p.1.
- 7 Duwamish (Renton: Students of Renton High School, 1911), 3.
- 8 "The Library," Duwamish (Renton: Renton High School. 1925), 44.
- 9 "Renton Champions Of King County for Sixth Year," Hi School News, 17 March 1925, p.1; "County Basketball for Girls Dropped," Hi School News, 8 December 1925, p.1; "Where Did That Cup Come From? Source of Permanent Trophies Told," Renton High News, 25 March 1930, p.3.
- 10 "As Our City Grows So Must Our Schools, As Our Schools Improve So Will Our City," Renton High News, 12 February 1924, p.1.
- 11 Dorothy Thompson, "Needs Warrant New Building," Renton High News, 16 December 1930, p.1; Lenore Lee, "Bond Issue to Decide School," Renton High News, 16 December 1930, p.1.
- 12 Editorial, "You Helped," Renton High News, 13 January 1931, p.2.



Renton High took great pride in its early sports achievements, as seen in this 1926 trophy case. (#2001.075.5702)

From the Collections Department...

By: Sarah Iles, Collection Manager

The Renton History Museum's collection now includes 14,500 photographs. Thanks to an earlier volunteer project, the Photograph Collection is the Museum's most thoroughly catalogued collection. A small portion of this collection, the oversize photographs, remained uncatalogued, however, and relatively inaccessible to Museum staff and researchers. A new Heritage Collections Care grant from 4Culture will help us change that.



The oversize photographs present special cataloguing and storage challenges that smaller photographs do not. It is important for us to have a digital copy of each photograph in our collection. This scanned image allows us to reduce the handling and exposure to light of the original photograph. We also use digital images to create reproductions for exhibition. Creating digital images of the oversize photographs is not simple, however. The images are too large for the scanner bed and must be scanned in parts. These parts must then be digitally pieced back together. This is far more time-consuming and technically difficult than scanning regular-sized photographs.

Due to their size, oversize photographs cannot be housed with the rest of the Photograph Collection. They require large flat acid-free boxes. We also try to store all photographs individually in archival quality sleeves. These sleeves are clear and allow the original photographs to be viewed without directly handling the photographs. The oversize photographs also benefit from storage in sleeves, but the cost of oversize sleeves can be prohibitive.

The oversize photograph collection numbers about 650 photographs. This is small compared to the overall collection, but still large enough to require a sizeable amount of resources and staff time to correctly catalogue and house. Earlier this year, the Museum applied to 4Culture's Heritage Collections Care Grant program in order to fund the project. The application was successful and work began on the project in mid-October.

The grant allowed the Museum to hire intern Andrea Cohen, a student in the University of Washington Museology Master's Program, to work on the project. Having worked as an intern with the Museum since January, Andrea was already familiar with our collections operations. She is currently hard at work scanning the images in parts and digitally piecing the parts together. Once she completes this phase of the project, Andrea will move on to cataloguing and properly housing the photographs.

The Museum's Photograph Collection is the single most frequently used segment of the collection, by other museums, researchers, staff, and the public. Once complete, this project will make 650 "new" images available to those groups. The oversize photographs represent important Renton industries such as coal mining, clay and coal processing, and logging and timbering. A significant number of photos also show Renton schools and students. "Discovering" these new images is exciting; as we make new discoveries, a new blog on the Museum's web site will post some of the more interesting photographs along with updates from the project. Check it out at www.rentonhistorymuseum.org!



Excavating Snoqualmie Pass, ca 1915. Renton men Thomas E. Trimm (second from left) and Thomas Faull, Jr. (third from left) worked on the project. From the oversize photograph collection. RHM# 1988.118.2707

Volunteer Report

By Dorota Rahn, Volunteer and Education Coordinator



Dear Volunteers and Members of the Renton Historical Society,

Throughout our personal and professional lives, people are always leaving us and joining us. Lately, the museum has experienced similar changes. Sadly, we recently had two cherished volunteers who passed away. Simona Castro died after a short fight with cancer. Simona helped at the museum for over 10 years, making sure that our exhibits and artifacts were free of dust. She was particularly fond of polishing the fire track while it was on display. She had a special way of greeting staff, always with a high five and a smile. She was always cheerful and became an important part of the museum community.

John Springer's life has also ended recently. He joined the museum a few years ago and immediately became a very outspoken member of our volunteer community. John was very passionate about teaching children and young people about Renton's history. He was constantly joking and openly admitting his passion for life and love. He was also a great community supporter and volunteered in many organizations including our museum. He brought joy to every meeting he attended.

We will miss Simona and John, two very special people who, with their different personalities, equally influenced our volunteer community and everybody around.

At the same time we have had a few new volunteers who joined the museum during the last few months. Michael Orm is a senior in high school and, in spite of his very busy schedule, he greets volunteers at the museum in his out-of-school time. His kind demeanor is much appreciated by his co-greeters. Juliet Santos also helps us with greeting visitors at the museum on Saturdays. Juliet's outgoing personality and passion for learning has been recognized by everybody who met her. She and Michael also helped at the museum booth during Renton River Days.

Daniel Sallen, a young man who also joined the museum greeters, is a very reliable and likeable volunteer who enjoys history and geography. Our forces were also strengthened by Charlotte Cline, a new greeter with an impressive volunteer experience and very broad interests. She positively encourages everybody who has an opportunity to work with her.

We are very lucky to have volunteers who responded to our needs. Please make them welcome in our community. We are still looking for greeters and encourage everybody who wants to help us in managing every-day operations to apply for a greeter position. Thanks to the devoted volunteers who take a few greeting shifts a month, we are able to keep the museum open on Saturdays.

The museum staff thanks everybody who takes time and helps with our operations. We wouldn't be able to serve the community without you!!!

We're sorry... The conclusion of the last quarterly's feature, "Pacific Northwest Coast and Coast Salish Native Cultures," was inadvertently left out. Here it is:

Currently there are many Native artists who continue the traditions of both design systems. Susan A. Point, Stan Greene, Shaun Peterson, Marvin Oliver, Roger Fernandes, and Michael Halady are among artists who create Coast Salish art and whose pieces we can find in museums, tribal communities, and public places around King County and beyond. They experiment with new media such as silk screens, metal, glass, and even digital technology. Some tools that they use have changed and some not, "but overall the underlying principles of a design remain unchanged." Contemporary Salish art is still based on a narrative and in doing so artists honor and continue the traditions of their ancestors.

Speaker Calendar

Saturday, December 11th at 11:00 a.m. Ancient Traditional Games with Alan Hirsch. Over 50 historical games and puzzles are included in this hands-on program. Throughout history, almost every culture played games. Native Americans, the Maori of New Zealand, and Icelandic peoples all played games that improved their thinking ability. This presentation offers students and families the opportunity to discover and play the games of many cultures. With simple rules to guide them, children and adults explore strategy games, once played by the Pharaohs, Vikings, and Apache Indians, as well as games from every continent. (Audience: elementary through adult.)



Join the Renton Historical Society Today!

Name: _____

Membership Level: _____

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Please make checks payable to the Renton Historical Society.

VISA/MASTERCARD # _____ Ex.Date: _____

Your Signature: _____

- Please share your e-mail address with us: _____
- Please send me a volunteer application form. (32/1)

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Obituaries Collected



denotes former Society Life Member



denotes former Society member

August 10 - September 30

Chauncey W. Betts

Albert Casper

Jack Chissus

Kathleen Cox

Delores Heine Daly

LeRoy Frederick

Verla Kindle

Sarah M. Lopan

Virginia Lynch

Darling "Dolly" Miskimens

Patricia Ann Nelson

James Toman 

Alton (Tom) Tomlinson

Douglas D. Tuttle

Albert Welch

October 31 - November 5

Floyd Anderson

Baird Bardarson, M.D.

Irene Castagno 

John Giuliani, Sr. 

Anne-Marie Heilpern

Raymond (Bill) O'Brien

George Perry

Cosmo (Tom) Rockey

George Saturnini 

John Springer

Dorothy Ringer Whitted

Memorial Contributions

August 15 - November 15

Baird Bardarson, M.D.

Wilma Dallosto

Juanita "Nita" Beckstrom

Wendell & Cleo Forgaard

John R. Giuliani, Sr.

Hazelle DuBois; Wendell & Cleo Forgaard

Stephen Grate

Anonymous

Virginia Lynch

Lila Campen; Dick Lucotch

Darling "Dolly" Miskimens

Donald & Carmel Camerini; Wendell & Cleo Forgaard; Lila Campen; Betty Sipila; John & Eleanor Bertagni

Patricia Nelson

Gayle Jones

James A. Toman

Christine Grubestic & Righi Family; Cecilia Major; Richard & Louise Major

Douglas Tuttle

Frances Sanders Subic

Nancy Ward

Diane Baker; Elizabeth P. Stewart

Jennifer Lynn Witt Young

Mary Sutter

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Don & Shirley Lindberg
Dorlene Bressan
Helenanne Botham
Ray Owens

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(\$100 and Over)

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James & Char Baker
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In Honor of Renton High School Class 1953

(Under \$100)

Mark & Barbara Santos-Johnson
Phyllis Davey
Mary Chamblin
Nancy Osborn
Jackie Kinunen
Don & Judy Gunderson
Maureen Holloway

In-Kind Donations

In memory of Gloria Nichols

*Portable music system and 5 CDs to be used at events
donated by Jack Morrison*

**Design of the Renton High School Centennial Mural
for the exhibit**

“Among Friends: Renton High’s 100 years”

Pritchard Design

**Design of exhibit panels for the
“Among Friends” Exhibit**

Will Samson

Installation of Exhibit Mural

Jeff Merrill

Fundraiser Pledges

(Over \$100)

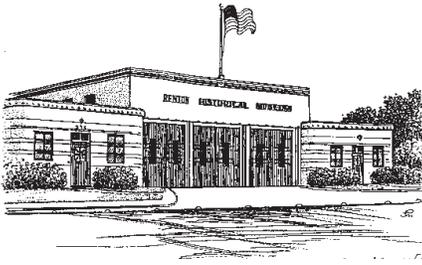
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In Hindsight...



Caption: Renton High School Manual Training class, 1914. Providing students with practical skills was one way to keep them in school longer. (#1980.079.1116)