



March 2011

Volume 42, Number 1

# 16 Going on 100: Renton High Teens Look at Life

In September of last year, the Renton History Museum unveiled an exhibit celebrating the centennial of Renton High School. The exhibit set out to describe Renton High School through the eyes of those closest to it: alumni, teachers, and current students. The editorial staff of the school's newsmagazine *ARROW* provided the content for current students. Their advisor, Derek Smith, asked the students to write about an object they find beautiful. Derek wrote that the objects that they chose "are intensely local and international, humorous and heartbreaking, deeply passionate and delightfully narcissistic, and display an intricate interweaving of intellect and inspiration."

Taken together with past student essays collected from yearbooks and student newspapers, these writings create a rich snapshot of student life in Renton over the past 100 years. Their friends and families are at the center of these teenagers' lives whether they lived in the 1910s or the 2010s, and cars and jewelry and clothes serve as symbols of their growing independence and aspirations. Museums preserve these historical symbols, as the repositories of keen memories.



*Above: ARROW staff members and their teacher Derek Smith at the unveiling of the mural featuring their essays in the exhibit Among Friends: Renton High's 100 Years at the Renton History Museum.*

*Masthead Photo: Milt Sessler, Andy Lewis, and Chet Sessler in front of Renton High, 1932. (#1985.058.10842) Continued on page 4*



**Renton Historical Quarterly**

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Renton History Museum  
235 Mill Avenue South  
Renton, WA 98057  
Phone: 425-255-2330  
FAX: 425-255-1570

[www.rentonhistorymuseum.org](http://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.**



# President's Message

By Sandra Meyer, President



We are into an exciting new year with the Society continuing to grow and evolve, building upon our mission to document, preserve, interpret and educate about the history of Renton by supporting the Renton Museum. Our focus in 2011 will be to maintain a fully staffed (active and diverse) board, increase membership, and to raise more funds to support operations and future capital needs.

With this in mind, there are specific projects and goals we have undertaken to emphasize and direct our activities. Since my last report we approved an updated Five Year Strategic Plan that now assigns responsibility for action items to a Society committee or Museum

staff. In order to meet our strategic goals the society will: (1) Operate a professional museum that Renton can be proud of; (2) Nurture a more diverse set of stakeholders; (3) Capture Renton Stories; (4) Tell Renton stories; and (5) Create community interest. Of all goals, "creating community interest" will be the key toward moving the Museum forward and into the limelight. While many people in Renton know about the Museum, new residents are not aware of this wonderful resource and the many changing exhibits and services offered. Those that have lived here for a long time are somewhat unaware of the many positive changes the Museum has undertaken under the stewardship of a committed Society Board and our nationally recruited Museum director.

The Museum Master Plan envisions physical changes to the current building that will make it more open, accessible and comfortable. You can read the plan on the Museum's web site: [www.rentonhistorymuseum.org](http://www.rentonhistorymuseum.org) The plan calls for exhibits to be developed with various groups in the community from all backgrounds, while continuing to honor and educate on the changes in Renton since incorporation in 1901. We are getting important feedback from community leaders on this proposed direction and will mold the plan as needed to remain true to our mission while also making the Museum a place where people want to come with their children and out-of-town guests.

Our Board is changing as needed and commitments are fulfilled. We regretfully say goodbye to Kristie Walker, who has been a dedicated Board member for the past four years. We are also graciously happy to welcome our newest Board member, Don Gentry, who has an extensive background in technology. We are currently looking for new Board members with an interest and background in fundraising, events planning, and marketing. If you have an interest and want to get involved, please contact the Museum for a Board application.

# Renton Museum Report

By Elizabeth P. Stewart, Director

All of us history-watchers know that the American economy—even the global economy—goes through up and down cycles, although, granted, this is a particularly long and difficult recession.



One of the upsides of a down cycle, however, is that it forces us to be clear about what is important to us. We think harder about our spending priorities, certainly, but also how we spend our time, energy, and attention. Watching the painful process of budgeting at the city, state, and federal level reminds us all that budgeting is a chance for us as citizens to weigh in on what we believe the priorities of government should be.

The governor and our legislators are currently wrestling with the fate of heritage and culture dollars, among many other equally painful decisions. At the national level, funding for the arts, humanities, and historic preservation is threatened. In Washington state, as I write this proposed cuts include the closing of the Washington State Historical Museum, drastic changes to the State Arts Commission, and the suspension of the Heritage Capital program.

One of the most significant sources of funding for arts and culture in King County, 4Culture, is also threatened by the possible sunset of the tax on hotel rooms that supports important educational and cultural benefits. Renton cultural organizations have received over \$500,000 from 4Culture, in grants which support projects at the Renton History Museum, Evergreen City Ballet, Renton Civic Theatre, and many others. Our museum alone has applied for and received grants totaling over \$60,000 in the past five years for projects that benefit our community, like the free Duwamish curriculum that we took to over 1400 fourth graders last year.

If as citizens we want to be able to take advantage of the benefits cultural and arts organizations offer, we must support these organizations with emails, phone calls, and checks. We can make sure that legislators at the state and federal level know how important museums are to us, as well as the cultural funding that supports them. We can increase our donations and our participation in their operations by volunteering or serving on their boards.

Without support from a variety of sources in a variety of ways, many of these organizations will not survive. How many of us look forward to a world without the good that museums do for our intellects, our zest for life, and our souls?

For more information about how you can help, go to [www.advocate4culture.org](http://www.advocate4culture.org) or [www.speakupformuseums.org](http://www.speakupformuseums.org).

*Liz Stewart*

"16 Going on 100" continued from page 1

Below we share a sample of these essays, contemporary and historical, as first-person accounts of life during high school years throughout Renton High's first 100 years. You can see many more in our *Among Friends* exhibit. We hope they bring back memories for you, too.



*Bathing beauties, 1915. (#1997.080.12306)*

**Baby Lightning Whelk,**

by Ann Bucher,  
Class of 2010

Every year, my grandmother on my mom's side goes down to Sanibel Island. Sanibel is a small island in the Gulf of Mexico off of Florida's coast, connected to the main land by a series of bridges. My grandmother started going down there with her mother every April for about a month, spending her days walking the beaches, looking for shells.

Out of all of the shells that wash up on the island's white sandy beaches, there is one that is special and different from all others. One that blends in and yet still manages to stand out.

The lightning whelk.

All shells, if you hold them upright facing towards you, open on the right. Lightning whelks on the other hand, open to the left. Seemingly just a normal shell, off white, dark lines of jagged brown, tapered to a point, the lightning whelk is one of a kind.

The last time that I went down with my grandmother and my mother to Sanibel, just for spring break, I found my very own lightning whelk. While this shell may appear commonly, it is often only in its full grown form and battered up by the surf. This one, however, was different.

We were walking along the beach, bent over at the waist, heading back toward the cottage we were staying in. Already out for a long day, we were no longer really looking at what we were walking over, just kind of glancing. Right before we reached the point where we would have to turn off the beach and head up to the cottage, I saw something, half buried in the sand. Reaching down to pull it out from among the shards of other shells, I realized what it was. A tiny, perfectly formed lightning whelk, untouched by the surf and the sand and the rocks, coming to a rest right where I could find it. When we got back to the cottage, I cleaned and rinsed the shell, displaying its true beauty to myself.

So small that it almost went unnoticed and so unique in its own way, I still find beauty in the little shell that I found, even if it may just seem like a drab, calcium-based exoskeleton protection of a dead mollusk.

**A Ford Is a Popular Thing at the Renton High School (1927)**

Whether the Renton students plan to trade their Fords in for the new ones when they arrive; or whether they have collected the various models that Ford has produced since 1913 is not known; but judging from the Fords parked in front of the school a week ago Friday, the latter statement is true. Out of the cars that were in front of the building a week ago Friday, 13 were Fords; it was a rather unlucky number and one had to be demolished. This was accomplished when one of them participated in a collision the afternoon of the same day. The Dodge sedan strutted its style, but it had to admit that it was among the Lizzies' sisters. The other age worn Dodge made the best of its surroundings, while the only Star was parked aside from the collection of Fords. The individual Fords all went by the name of "Lizzie," but to make their titles distinctive they suffixed various dates ranging in the following order: "Lizzie 1913," "Lizzie 1917," "Lizzie 1918," "Lizzie 1919," "Lizzie 1920," "Lizzie 1921," "Lizzie 1922," "Lizzie 1926." Some of the "Lizzies" were twins, and one called itself "Lizzie Junior 1927." Renton high school must be the Ford School.



*Last Model T delivered to Renton, 1927. (#41.10760)*



**My scar by the left side of my nose**

by Chrysanthemum Binayug,

Class of 2011

When I was in fifth grade I was playing rough tetherball with a girl named Julie and we were in teams. She tried to hit the ball her hardest but instead she hit my face.

Her nail dug in my skin and left a nail-shaped scar. Whether or not it was on purpose, I don't know. She was kind of crazy.

The scar stayed with me. At first I used to think it was the ugliest thing and I was insecure about my face. When I took pictures I would take it from the right side to try and hide my scar. Later on I stopped trying to face people with the right side of my face only.

It is a tiny scar. Barely noticeable. I was the one magnifying it.

I started just accepting the scar. Eventually I just saw it as my cute crescent shaped boo boo. It is going to stay with me forever and it's a piece of my childhood that I take with me everywhere I go. It might just be with me forever.



Mr. and Mrs. Billy Cole's wedding, photo, 1918.  
(#1966.034.0225)

**ii Marry Young or Wait? (1959)**

With several high school girls already married and many others wearing engagement rings the questions of early marriage is a problem to many. After consulting with teachers and students the following comments concerning this touchy subject were received:

**Mr. Winegard:** I believe that a person should have reached a maturity level which will allow them to cope with the problems created by marriage.

**Sandy De Lappe:** I think they should wait till at least the day after graduation.

**Ted Baer:** I don't think they marry so very young here – just thing [sic], at 12, in South America, everyone is married.

**Miss Husby:** I think it's silly.

**Susan Burrus:** I think that people can fall in love at any age and know it is the real thing so I don't think that age should be a factor in the success of any marriage.

**Mike Nevills:** I don't believe in early marriages. Kids just out of their teens haven't seen enough of life to know their true emotions. A few years of work and living in the adult world should be mandatory before entering into something as lasting as matrimony.

**Mr. Magden:** There is no general rule about how old you should be to get married. The only objection I have is when the person or persons involved are not mature.

**My Mardi Gras Mask,**

by Hayley Brunk,  
Class of 2010

In the eighth grade, I was graced with the opportunity to go to New Orleans,

Louisiana to participate in the 2007 US Open for Taekwondo. Needless to say, it was an amazing experience. Just to be there and to compete at that level is insane. I had competed nationally before, but despite its name, it was a World tournament.

Looking back now, I probably could've fought better than I did. I could've fought harder; I could've put more into it. Yet, at the same time, I'm proud of what I did, just because I was there. Only a handful of people in the world can say that. It wasn't even the tournament itself that made the trip special.

What made it special was the fact that it was just a couple of years after Hurricane Katrina hit, so you could still see the extensive damage it had caused. You can still see that damage in the Mardi Gras mask I got from the boardwalk, which was probably on sale because of the fracture on the nose of the mask.

The mask is special to me because it not only reminds me of the great experience, the people, and the tournament, but also because it reminds me of the devastation and diversity we saw. One minute, it would be this beautiful city and about three minutes later, you would see nothing but ruins.

Despite the ruins, New Orleans was still as beautiful and diverse as it is portrayed on TV, especially so the week after Mardi Gras. It could have been Christmastime, all of the trees were adorned with strings of beads hanging from their branches.



<sup>i</sup> *Renton High News*, 11 October 1927, p.1.

<sup>ii</sup> *The Chieftain*, 20 November 1959, p.3.

# From the Collections Department...

By: Sarah Iles, Collection Manager



It's very hard to picture Renton as it used to be in 1909-1910, a small but growing town with two rivers running through it. Farmland and grazing cattle occupied a vast territory where Rainier Avenue sits today. A coal mine operated where City Hall lies. Renton Hill, Downtown, and North Renton were the only neighborhoods.

1910 wasn't particularly exciting for Renton; except for the first

woman voting, no defining event in Renton's history occurred that year. Yet 1910 is in focus because of what survives: multiple historical sources. 1909 and 1910 were well recorded. Sources retained from that time period include: the 1909 Renton City Directory, 1909 Sanborn fire insurance maps, the 1910 Federal Census, and photographs covering most of the town.

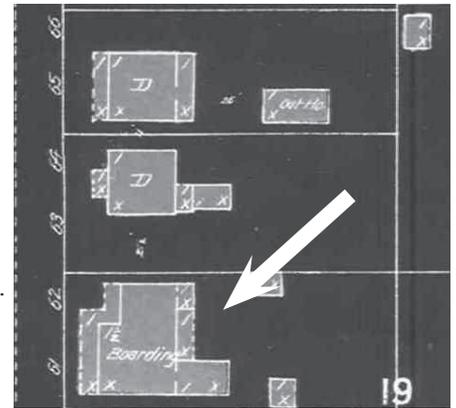
Compiling these resources and layering the data allows for a clearer picture of 1910 Renton to come through. More for this time than about any other in Renton's history, we know who lived where, who worked where, where businesses were located, and what the town looked like. One of the town's first photographers, Walling M. Horton, set up shop in Renton sometime around 1909. His photos provide wonderful snapshots of what Renton looked like and what it was like to live in Renton.

Our hope is that in the future these layers of data can be integrated into GIS mapping software (or other similar program). For example, we could place the Sanborn fire insurance map on top of the topographical map for the area. We could layer in data that includes street names, business names, and home owners. Photographs of individual buildings could be connected to the buildings shown on the Sanborn map. Current day photographs could be linked to 1910 photographs of the same location. The possibilities are endless.

While we have the historic sources for this project, we do not yet have the mapping software or the resources available to purchase it. We hope to find a grant to fund this project but in the meantime we keep integrating the data the best we can. The most important outcome of such a project is all the incorporated information would be available to the public in a manner that provides a full, clear picture of Renton in 1910.



The Palace Hotel, 1909. The hotel was located on Williams between 4th and 5th. Willis G. and Mattie Benedict, proprietors. RHM# 2006.043.005b



Palace Hotel on the 1909 Sanborn fire insurance map.

Benedetti Fred J, miner Renton Coal Mine, h nr s end Renton av  
**BENEDICT FRANK H**, Pres Benedict-Wilson Lumber Co, h Morris nr 4th Av  
 Benedict Roy A, student, b F H Benedict  
 Benedict Willis G, propr Palace Hotel, h same  
**BENEDICT-WILSON LUMBER CO**, F H Benedict Pres, W H Johnson Vice-Pres, W G Wilson Sec-Treas, Lumber, Mill

Benedict Williams L	Widow	M	22	42	M
Mattie	Wife	F	22	34	M
Clyde	Son	M	22	14	B
George W	Son	M	22	12	B
Good	Son	M	22	5	B
Mildred A	Daughter	F	22	8	B
Mirabel	Daughter	F	22	3	B

Benedict family in the 1910 Federal Census. Nine boarders, mostly carpenters and laborers, are listed with the family.

Willis Benedict in the 1909 City Directory.

# Volunteer Report

By Dorota Rahn, Volunteer and Education Coordinator



Dear Volunteers and members of the Renton Historical Society,

In January we celebrated the retirement of Louise Delaurenti George who had spent the last 27 years serving the museum. She told an interviewer for *Renton Patch* that there was no paid staff at the museum when she started in 1982, "even the museum director was a volunteer."

For more than a quarter century Louise took care of memorial donations, wrote thank you letters, collected obituaries, and performed other vital clerical duties.

She was not only very professional with everything she did, but extremely gracious as well. We all could learn from her that being polite, sending thank you notes after every event she attended, and being generous with praise can go a long way with people. We love her for everything she represents, including a nostalgic feel for the past. How appropriate for a history museum! We will have to get along without her skills now, but we hope that Louise will visit us as often as possible, bringing her special charm with her.

So far Louise has kept her promise of participating in our social life. She joined museum volunteers for a visit to the Museum of History and Industry to see *Clutch It! The Purse and The Person* exhibit. This incredible collection of over 2,000 purses and accessories explored the changing roles of women in the American society through their handbags and their contents.

Museum volunteers also participated in our annual Valentine's Day Luncheon on February 14th. Museum staff and members of the Renton Historical Society board thanked volunteers for their support of museum operations, in areas like greeting visitors on Saturdays, giving museum tours and doing classroom outreach, performing clerical duties and working on collections projects, taking oral histories, and helping with Renton River Days. Valentine's Day is an occasion to tell our volunteers how much we love them.

February is also Black History Month and we had two special programs. Storyteller and actor Eva Abrams performed a re-enactment of the first female African-American licensed pilot Bessie Coleman who was also the first U.S. citizen to get an international pilot license.

In our family program, Kunle Oguneye, our very own Rentonian, shared African folktales with families, with music, drumming, dancing, and storytelling

Please mark your calendars for *Finding Aunt Phoebe: My Search for the True Life of Phoebe Goodell Judson* by Mary Michaelson on Tuesday, March 15th at 5:00 p.m. We also have two programs in May, *Wild and Watery Tales* and *Tunes* with Karen Haas on May 7 and *Reading Between the Lines: The Stories Old Buildings Tell Us* by Michael Herschensohn on May 10. Please check our web site, [www.rentonhistorymuseum.org](http://www.rentonhistorymuseum.org), for details.

See you at the museum for the Spring 2011 Speaker Program and to visit our exhibits!

The Renton History Museum is a member of the Retired Citizens Volunteers Program (RSVP). RSVP's mission is "to meet critical community needs by linking people 55 and older with volunteer opportunities that respond to those needs, and to support and recognize their service."

Our volunteers can become members of RSVP by registering through the museum. The benefits for RSVP members include:

Travel reimbursement to and from your volunteer agency (our museum), if needed;

- Supplemental insurance coverage while volunteering, and to and from your volunteer work;
- Volunteer placement at an agency of your choice;
- A free copy of RSVP quarterly publication, Experience in Action;
- An invitation to RSVP annual recognition event;
- Yearly recognition of your volunteer service with pins and certificates;
- A source of help should any problem arise during work.

Please contact Dorota Rahn, Volunteer Coordinator, at 425-255-2330 or [drahn@rentonwa.gov](mailto:drahn@rentonwa.gov) in case you want to sign up with RSVP or have questions.

### General Contributions

Thanks to all the donors who made our October 2010 Dinner Auction such a success!

Joseph & Marjorie Avolio  
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A contribution of \$600 was given by the Renton High School Class of 1948

### In-Kind Donations

**In memory of Gloria Nichols**  
*Flat Screen TV and DVD Player*  
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**Please make checks payable to the Renton Historical Society.**

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Your Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please share your e-mail address with us: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me a volunteer application form. (32/1)

Mail To: Membership Secretary, Renton Historical Society  
 235 Mill Avenue South, Renton, Washington 98057-2133

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denotes former Life Member

denotes former member



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Karen Jo Dobson

Marie McPeak family

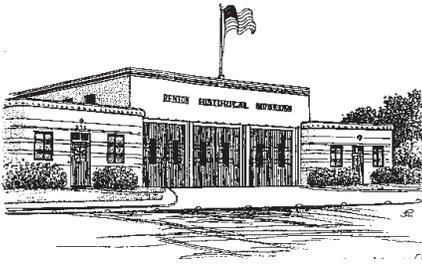
George Verheul

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Victor Bloomfield & Jeni Skuk family

## Overdue Memberships

*PLEASE CHECK TO SEE IF YOU HAVE PAID YOUR 2011 DUES. PROMPT PAYMENT SAVES MAILING A SECOND NOTICE. IF YOU CAN'T REMEMBER THE AMOUNT DUE, LOOK FOR THE FORM PRINTED IN THE QUARTERLY. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP.*



Renton History Museum  
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Renton, WA 98057

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# In Hindsight...



Jack Morrison recently donated this photo of a 1943 Renton High School production of *You Can't Take It With You*. Young Jack Morrison is on the far left; left to right are: Ray Benton, Colleen Watson, Diana Galiano, and Ted Hamilton. (#2011.013.006)