



THE OLYMPIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY VOL 1 NO. 2 ~ SPRING 2005

SOCIETY HONORS LYNN ERICKSON'S "SYLVESTER'S WINDOW" PROJECT

On Sunday, March 6, the Olympia Historical Society honored Lynn Erickson for her "Sylvester's Window" Project. Turnout for the reception was excellent. Approximately 50 people attended the event held at the State Capitol Museum Coach House. Special thanks to Olympia Federal Savings and Olympia Historical Society members who volunteered to make it a success.



Lynn Erickson

Lynn and artist Bob Chamberlain developed eight detailed renderings of Olympia from the years 1841, 1856, 1874, 1899, 1933, 1950, 1972, and 2001 as the city might have appeared from an upstairs window of Edmund Sylvester's house.

Sylvester, a founder of Olympia, built his house south of town in the 1850s. It was located near the current Greyhound Bus Depot located at 7th Avenue and Capital Way.

Lynn conceived the project to be a teaching tool for schoolchildren to demonstrate how Olympia has changed over the decades. Each rendering, approximately 3 ft. by 5 ft., was painstakingly researched by Lynn. The paintings required numerous

revisions to corroborate documented facts with sometimes incomplete memories.

Lynn supplemented each painting with prepared teaching packets. These describe the scenes, and include short biographies of historical figures featured in the paintings. These notables included a wide assortment of local figures from Nisqually headman Leschi (1841), to KGY personality Dick Pust (1972), and former Governor Gary Locke (2001).

The project has been underway for almost four years. Generous support from over twenty individuals, businesses, organizations, foundations and school districts helped finance its development.

The public will be able to view the originals on permanent display at the Olympia Timberland Library. Copies of the paintings and accompanying materials will be available by mid-summer to educators for the cost of duplication, and to the general public soon thereafter.

To learn more about the project or to get a set, contact the Society. ★



Detail of 1933 poster showing depression era "Hunger Marchers" rallying at Sylvester Park before their march on the capitol.

THE OLYMPIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WEBSITE:

WWW.OLYMPIAHISTORY.ORG

EMAIL:

OLYMPIAHISTORY@YAHOO.COM

Where Was That?

The Washington Hotel

by Roger Easton

You are looking at a site of the earliest beginnings of Olympia, now the corner of Thurston and Capital Way, (formerly 2nd and Main). The top photo, shows the Washington Hotel built by Edmund Sylvester before 1853. (Sylvester also built the city's first hotel, The Olympia House, nearby).

Isaac Stevens, first territorial governor of Washington, arrived at the hotel in 1853. It later served as the site of his Inaugural Ball.

The Legislature met in Olympia's favorite watering hole, the *Gold Bar Restaurant*, located just next door (partly shown on the right side). The hotel seemed the perfect place for tired legislators to mingle after a long day's session.

The Washington Hotel was also the preferred site for Olympia's performing arts including burlesque extravaganzas, songs, dances, concerts and dramas. In 1854, the *Pioneer & Democrat* newspaper proudly asserted, "We will not be many years behind our Portland contemporaries in having a regular BUILT theater of our own to blōw about," using the hotel its proof.

In 1879, Sylvester sold the hotel to William and Edward T. Young. The brothers changed the name first



THEN: The Washington Hotel, ca. 1858. Photo provided by the Lacey Museum.

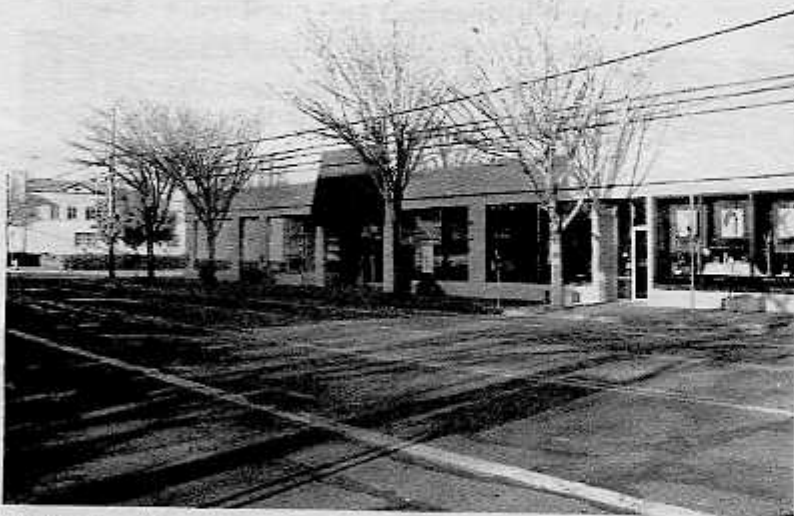
to the *New England House*, then shortly to *Young's Hotel*.

William died only a month after the purchase, but his brother modernized the building twice over the years, adding the newest technological features. He kept the building until 1899, when Lacey hotelier George Huggins bought it. Huggins changed the name to *Hotel Huggins* and awarded the manager's position to his daughter, Georgia.

By 1903, the hotel lured few travelers because it was no longer fashionable and generally rundown. The business district had shifted south several blocks, and the area north of State Street had become mostly saloons and brothels.

The Gold Bar Restaurant and the little territorial capitol on the hill still stood testament to the early years of government in Olympia. However, the newest capitol could be seen from anywhere in the city by its eight-sided clock tower. It marked the official new town center adjacent to Sylvester's Park, located between 6th (now Legion) and 7th Avenues.

Today, if you stand on the west side of Capital Way between State and Thurston streets and look across to the northeast, you will see a low commercial building. Just to the right of the building's door, mounted in the sidewalk, is the a bronze plaque set in the sidewalk. It marks the site of the Gold Bar Saloon, location of the first Territorial Legislature so many years ago. ★



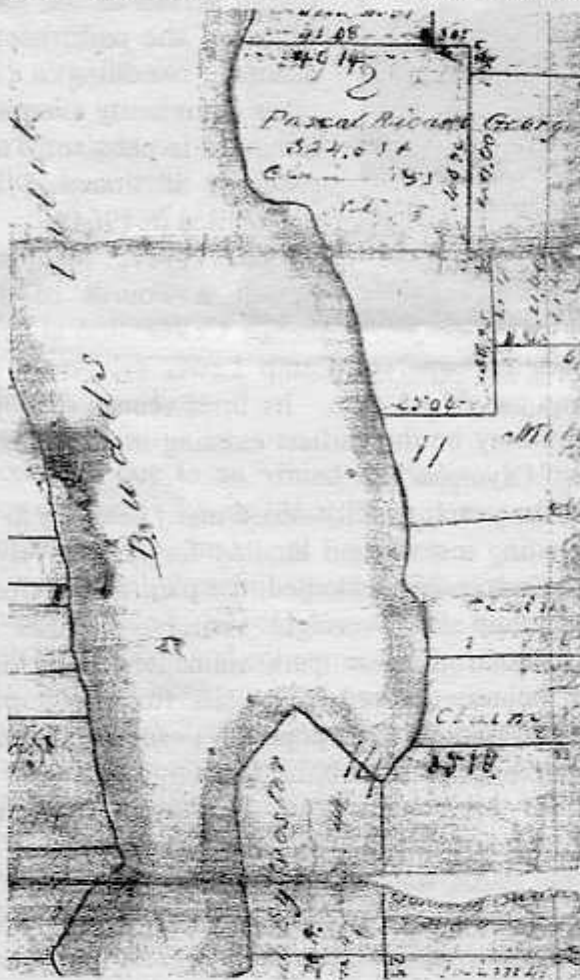
NOW: East side of Capital Way between State and Thurston Avenues.

OLYMPIA'S BACKYARD: THE EARLY HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF PRIEST POINT PARK

BY EDWARD ECHTLE

The year 2005 marks the 100th anniversary of the designation of Priest Point as an official Olympia city park, although residents and visitors used the area as a site for outdoor recreation since the mid-1800s. Prior to that, Priest Point was a crossroads of regional history, hosting generations of native peoples, early missionaries, itinerant settlers, and weary travelers. While Priest Point lies at the outskirts of town, its role in Olympia's past makes its history a key story in an overall understanding of the community's past.

When the first Americans arrived on Puget



1854 claim map, showing area around Budd Inlet.
Fr. Pascal Ricard's DLC is at the top and Edmund
Sylvester's Claim, now Olympia, is near bottom.
Southwest Washington Region Archives

Squaxin land. Tribes, including Nisqually, Puyallup, Chehalis, Suquamish, Duwamish and others shared access to the inlet's abundant shellfish beds. Seasonal encampments and year-round dwellings dotted the shores of Budd Inlet. At Priest Point, a natural spring and a productive fish trap located on Ellis Creek supported permanent residents. Early Anglo-Europeans noted a native cemetery of tree-burials near the site as well.

The abundance of resources made Priest Point an attractive site for a claim. In 1848, responding to a request by French Canadian Hudson Bay Company employees for spiritual leadership, Catholic clergy came to the northwest. Father Pascal Ricard chose Budd Inlet as the site of a mission due to its location along the main route of travel through the region, its proximity to the American settlement at Tumwater, and the large numbers of prospective Indian converts in the vicinity. Ricard filed a Donation Land Claim that encompassed the mission site and the current park lands. There the Order of Oblates of Mary Immaculate established the St. Joseph's Mission. Ricard organized a school for the purpose of converting the native population and to teach carpentry and other industrial skills mainly to young converts.

By the 1850s, St. Joseph's mission complex included orchards, gardens, and three structures: a school, a dwelling and a dining hall. The buildings were built of hand hewn timbers with shake roofs. Despite the rough conditions, travelers often commented on the well-kept grounds and the hospitality of the priests. Many early Olympians visited the mission regularly, including Margaret Stevens, wife of Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens, in order to converse in French.

In 1855-56 tensions between settlers and Indians over recently negotiated treaties turned violent. American settlers built stockades and lived in fear of raids, while the territorial government forced local natives to internment camps on Squaxin and Fox Islands. The Fathers' amicable relations with the Native Americans made them suspect in the eyes of American settlers who cast them as sympathizers. While the priests attempted to appear neutral, some early settlers later recalled that the missionaries kept

Sound in the 1840s, the shores of Budd Inlet were

American settlers apprised of the mood of the local Indians. During the conflict, some South Sound natives who chose to lay down arms did so after consulting with the mission priests.

In 1860, the priests abandoned the mission. Ricard had returned to France in 1857, and when he died in 1867, his executors disposed of the land.

Over the next decades, a series of settlers used the mission structures as temporary housing. The John Sternberg Family occupied the school and partitioned it into smaller rooms, but shortly thereafter moved to town because they didn't care for the isolated setting.

By the late 19th century Olympia residents used the former mission lands as a picnic site. Lying

within an easy boat's row from the town, the area served as a popular destination for day outings. In summer, some local entrepreneurs offered steam powered launch service to Priest Point. Olympians camped, hiked, hunted, and swam in the relatively undeveloped land.

After statehood in 1889, the expansion of Olympia made Priest Point lands desirable to developers. Delinquent taxes on the property forced foreclosure and the city set an auction date. Meanwhile, local community activists wished to see the land become a park and sprang into action. While accounts vary, all agree that prominent businessmen Theodore Brown, Elias Payn (also known as the promoter of the proposed ship canal between Olympia and Grays Harbor,) and T. J. Kegley were the main promoters of the town's acquiring of the land for a park. Their attorney, PM Troy, became Olympia City Attorney in the 1890s, and sealed the deal with popular support.

By 1905 Olympia completed the necessary actions, including purchasing the land and

extending town limits to encompass the park, to make it a reality. In 1907 the state deeded the tidelands to the city, as long as they were used for park purposes.

Immediately, the city and local residents began remaking the park as a community space. The city celebrated with a series of community clam bakes and volunteer work parties.



*The Chalet, donated by Leopold Schmidt.
Note the cannon in the foreground.
Postcard from a private collection.*

Leopold Schmidt, founder of the Olympia Brewing Company, donated a chalet used to display his products at the Portland Lewis and Clark Exposition in 1905. For years the Chalet served as the social center of the park, hosting dances, weddings, and other community events. It remained in place until time rendered it unusable and dismantled in 1964.

In 1917, Olympia hosted a Fourth of July Picnic Celebration at Priest

Point Park in honor of Camp Lewis soldiers. The event was caught on film. Its brief scenes of happy picnickers may be the earliest existing motion picture footage of Olympia.

Over the years, the city added many features to the site, including a dock and landing for boats. As the age of the automobile emerged, the park also included a motor camp for overnight visitors. Records are unclear, but it appears park managers may have allowed the use of dredging spoils from Olympia's Harbor to enlarge the popular swimming beach. Concessionaires placed bids with the city for the opportunity to be the sole purveyors of candy, cigarettes, and other sundries to summer crowds.

In the 1920s the city granted the Boy and Girl Scouts permission to use the land north of Ellis Cove as they saw fit, their only stipulation: do not remove the trees.

There were also animal attractions, a standard feature of city parks in the early 1900s. Historian Gordon Newell suggested there was a small zoo at the site. Anecdotal accounts suggest a caged bear lived in

the park. From Tumwater Falls, Olympia Light and Power donated a number of elk to wander the grounds and peafowl roamed freely. The peacocks and peahens remained a popular feature until the mid 1960s and they are still one of the most frequently recounted memories of the place.

Along with the memories of good times associated with the park, there were activities and events that reflected difficult issues faced by citizens in any era. For example, lean economic

times in the 1910s through the 1930s prompted the town to hire unemployed heads of families at \$1.25 a day to cut firewood at the park for sale to the public. In a letter to the parks department written in the 1920s, a park concessionaire explained his inability to fulfill

his contract due to an armed robbery at the park. Motor campers who stayed at the park wrote letters complaining of unkempt conditions in park facilities. In all, these incidents signified the impact of extensive use by people from a wide and diverse spectrum of social and economic backgrounds.

In January 1933, unemployed men and women from Seattle and Tacoma marched on the Capitol at Olympia to demand government relief. Olympia businessmen feared violence from the "hunger march" but none materialized. When organizers announced a second larger march later that winter, the Olympia business community made it known they were unwelcome and many residents joined the "American Vigilantes of Thurston County" to guard the city. When the marchers arrived the guards diverted them to the camp at Priest Point Park and kept them there under armed guard. The large

group strained park facilities to their limits; local police cleared the park within a few days.

Eventually, relief from the effects of the Great Depression came from the federal government. As in many municipal parks nationwide, programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration supported the park improvements. At Priest Point Park, this included walking trail improvements and outdoor kitchens, which are still in evidence today.

In the 1970s, popular interest in historical sites spiked with the nation's bicentennial. There was a proposal to construct a replica of the mission and make an interpretive trail telling the site's early mission history. These improvements never materialized.

The importance of Priest Point Park in local and regional history, while little

known to today's population, has not diminished. Its central role as Olympia's community backyard for over a century made it a stage for community outings and family events that include both celebrations and ceremonies as well as the a site of occasional iniquity and injustice. The park is an enduring legacy for its role as a place that reflects Olympia in all its eras, and Olympia residents when they are most themselves, relaxing and having a good time. ★

Further reading:

Fr. Ronald Wayne Young, OMI, "Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate: Father Pascal Ricard and his fellow Oblate missionaries had no easy time of it in the Pacific Northwest." *Columbia*: Fall 2003; Vol. 17, No. 3

David Nicandri, *Olympia's Forgotten Pioneers: The Oblates of Mary Immaculate*. Olympia: State Capitol Historical Association, 1976.



*Dock and Float at Priest Point Park (Date Unknown)
Postcard from a private collection*

ERRATA

Chief Justice Gerry Alexander clarified a point in found in the article, "It's Future Is A Bright One" (*OHSQ - Vol. 1, No. 1*). Footnote #4 indicated that the original territorial library volumes are now housed in the State Library.

In fact, the original collection was subsequently divided. Books related to law were moved to the Temple of Justice Law Library. The remaining volumes stayed at the State Library.

All volumes are available to researchers by appointment.

Thanks for the explanation!



We welcome all your comments and corrections! Thanks for making our newsletter a dialogue of history.



Priest Point Park Centennial Celebration

June 4, 2005

11:00 am to 5:00 pm

The Olympia Historical Society, in cooperation with Olympia Parks and Recreation, commemorate the 100th anniversary of the park on June 4, 2005. Historical displays, movies and interesting memorabilia showcase the park's past. After the picnic and presentations, Society members will be on hand to share stories and interpret key historical features in the park. Individual "history stations" offer live interpretation, including the Native American presence, the Catholic Mission, long vanished park structures, and more. We'll be happy to answer questions and share stories and memories with visitors!

Do *you* have personal memories, family photos, or memorabilia of Priest Point Park? Share them with the Historical Society! We'll be happy to accept donations, copy photos or documents, or interview people with connections to the park for our upcoming display.

Contact Kathy Thompson

email: kthompso@ci.olympia.wa.us

phone: 360- 753-8019

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Web Links

Sites of Interest for Local Historians

A Guide to Olympia's Past

www.trpc.org/external/programs/historic+preservation/olyhistoric/
Thurston Regional Planning Council

University of Washington Digital Archives

content.lib.washington.edu/cgi-bin/advsearch.exe

Includes many Olympia area related photos and documents

Washington State Place Names Database

search.tpl.lib.wa.us/wanames/

Tacoma Public Library Northwest Room

