



Spring 2008

Bigelow House Museum Joins State Parks!

After months of work, Olympia's Bigelow House will become the newest unit in the Washington State Parks. The Olympia Historical Society shares volunteer resources with Bigelow House museum and uses the facility for meetings. Bigelow House Preservation Association Board member Shanna Stevenson was instrumental in brokering a new three-way partnership between BHPA, State Parks, and the City of Olympia, which will provide grounds keeping support. Stevenson is currently the head of the Washington Women's History Consortium, helping prepare for the centennial anniversary of Washington granting votes to women. The pioneer Bigelow family were lifelong advocates of equal suffrage and Bigelow House is a key site of women's history in Washington State.



For more information, visit the BHPA website:
www.bigelowhouse.org

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Message from OHS President Lanny Weaver

2008 is a year of change for OHS. First, we owe a huge thank-you to outgoing president Annamary Fitzgerald, who has guided the society since its inception in 2001! We will forever be indebted to her.

Please join me in welcoming new board members Deb Ross and Rianne Perry, who are taking the spots previously held by Annamary Fitzgerald and Shanna Stevenson. Deb has agreed to be the vice-president and Rianne is our new secretary. Both are enthusiastic and have already contributed some great new ideas.

A word of appreciation should also go to: Shanna Stevenson, former secretary and frequent presenter, Lois Fenske, long-time treasurer, Ed Echtle, former vice-president and keeper of the website,

Roger Easton, newsletter chair, and Sue Goff for her tireless work with the collections.

As we discussed at our last meeting, the Olympia Historical Society will be participating in the Olympia Heritage Commission Forum held May 3rd at the Olympia Center. Please sign up for a stint at the OHS booth and take advantage of the many interesting presentations being offered, including one by yours truly.

Our upcoming year is shaping up to be an exciting one, starting with the forum in May. Programs scheduled for August and November are in the final planning stages and should be both fun and informative; details to be announced soon. See you in 2008!

JOIN OHS TODAY!

MEMBERSHIP FORM:
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The Olympia Historical Society

Founded 2001

2008 Board

Roger Easton
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Where Was That?

In 1852 Olympia residents formed Masonic Lodge # 5 under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Oregon, the first in Washington Territory. Pioneer newspaperman T.F. McElroy served as the first Master. The original roster is a who's who of early Olympia men including J.W. Wiley, M.T. Simmons, N. Delin, Ira Ward, Smith Hays, F.A. Clark, C.H. Hale, Col. B.F. Shaw and B.F. Yantis.

Masonic Temple, 1905



This building, located on what is now Capital Way between Eighth and Ninth Streets, was built on land donated by Olympia founder Edmund Sylvester. Built in the popular Greek Revival style, it was one of the first substantial structures constructed in pioneer-era Olympia.

Completed before the first capital, it was also the sight of the second and third convenings of the territorial Legislature in 1855 and 1856. The structure survived until 1911.

In 1935 Olympia Historian George Blankenship produced a short history of the lodge, available on our website:



www.olympiahistory.org/texts/blankenship_masons.txt

Speakers' Bureau Forming Now!

During the last six years, the Olympia Historical Society has supplied speakers on historical topics to many groups and organizations. It has been done on an informal basis up to now. This year we're establishing a more formal Speakers' Bureau comprised of volunteers from the Olympia Historical Society available to speak on topics from local history. For anyone who is feeling hesitant about speaking, I will be happy to work with you. I look forward to hearing from you about joining the Speakers' Bureau. Contact Lois Fenske: lfenske@comcast.net or 357-5758

Hannah by Nellie Robertson

"Hannah" is novelist Nellie Robertson's fifth work of fiction and is set in 1860s Olympia. Autographed copies available for \$20 each.

Contact Nellie Robertson by email at nelleva@msn.com

In Their Own Words: 1878 Interview With John Swan

Transcribed and researched by Roger Easton and Edward Echtle

In the late 1800s, historian Hubert Howe Bancroft (1832–1918) traveled the western territories gathering information for his seminal multi-volume histories of the region. A major component of his research were firsthand interviews with early settlers. Bancroft visited Olympia in 1878 and interviewed several pioneers including Olympia founder Edmund Sylvester. He also spoke with other early arrivals, including John M Swan, (1823-1904) whose donation land claim encompassed much of what is now the east side of Olympia.



Swan arrived in Olympia in 1850 and was a shipwright by trade. He built his first home in Olympia on one of the lots given away by Sylvester to anyone who agreed to build a house and stay. Swan then took up the claim just east of Sylvester's. Originally, the eastside of Olympia was separated from what is now downtown by a tidal inlet that stretched south all the way to the present intersection of Union Ave. and Plumb St. Swan platted his own community, which he called "Swantown," and locals referred to the inlet as "Swantown slough." In 1856 settlers constructed a bridge to connect Swantown and Olympia on 4th Avenue, approximately between present Cherry and Chestnut Streets. Filling eradicated the slough in the early 1900s, though the name lives on in the Swantown Marina development.

Bancroft's research and collected manuscripts eventually became the core of the Bancroft Library at University of California Berkeley where this transcript and many other such interviews reside today. Originally written in long-hand, the interview is presented here as written, misspellings and bad grammar intact. The text includes notes in [brackets] for clarification and annotations so that the reader may follow references made by Swan.

"THE COLONISATIONS AROUND PUGET SOUND"

J. M. Swan
Olympia, W.T., 1878

This article was continued from a conversation with John M. Swan by H. Bancroft at the Hotel Olympia, Sunday evening, June 9th, 1878. Present were John M. Swan, H. Bancroft and Frank Tarbell. (1) Mr. Swan said:

There is one little thing I happened to think of while the Captain (Tarbell) was relating his experiences. It would have a bearing upon the extent of country the Hudson Bay Company (2) carried their business on in. I remember hearing Mr. Work (3) tell once about camping when he was a trapper. He was a trapper when he was a young man camping on the very ground where the gold was discovered. (4) I do not remember anything about it only that this was the place where gold was first discovered in California. He said he had a body of men under his charge for a considerable time on the very spot where the gold was first discovered. When I heard him tell this it was a long time before gold was discovered on the Fraser at all. (5) He referred to the place where gold was first discovered, at Coloma [California] I suppose.

I left San Francisco on the 24th day of April 1849 and went to the mines [in the Sierra Nevada foothills]. Was in the mines about three months and got sick up there! Got the bilious complaint. (6) As far as society was concerned it was pretty rough. I left the mines on account of my health. After staying there a while my health was such that I got a little afraid of California. I thought I would get away from there. I understand that Vancouver Island was to be colonized, and thought I would go up there. I found a vessel coming up to the Sound. Men who went from this section to the mines had purchased it. They bought the vessel on a sort of speculation. I presume it was the only way they

John Swan Interview, cont.

could get here. The vessel came from Calais or Eastport, Maine I think. It was the "Orbit" (7)

I was in Victoria only one day ashore. I did not like their terms and condition of settlement and came along with the vessel to its destination. There was an inducement to come here, [Olympia] of course. It was expected by the few people that were in Oregon, and on the Sound that every settler was going to get 640 acres of land for nothing. They got it afterwards. This was in the winter of 1849-50. The bill passed Congress on the 27th of the following September. The provisions of the bill were that a single man would get 320 acres and a man and wife 640 acres. That is what they called the Donation [Act?] I took up the claim adjoining Sylvester's in the spring of 1850. (8) That was before the town was laid out here. When that vessel came up here Simmons (9) had two shares in here and he was the leading one here at the time. When he came here previously to that, he built a sawmill and a small gristmill at Tumwater. (10) I think it would be 1848. He sold the Tumwater property that he had there to Crosby & Grey for \$35,000. (11) At the time I came here he was a man with some money besides his interest in the vessel. (12) He had some lumber up there and that with shingles, he loaded on the vessel and sent her to San Francisco. [Charles Harte] Smith, who came up as a passenger at the time right from San Francisco, he went down as super cargo to dispose of that lumber in San Francisco; but he did not find the market there to his satisfaction, and instead of selling the lumber, he stored it. And with that same money that Simmons sent with him, and some security on the lumber he bought up a stock of goods. Simmons and Smith started merchandising in Olympia. That was the first store; that was in 1850. I think they arrived with the goods in July 1850. It was a building 20 x 40 feet, two stories high made of undressed lumber. It was about the South West corner of First and Main Streets. (13) I do not think there was over 3 houses here at the time, aside from that store building. (14)

When Smith came up with those goods, [Captain Lafayette] Balch (15) came up with a vessel. He wanted to get some lots here. Sylvester donated some lots to Simmons and Smith as a bonus for starting the store and Balch wanted to get a location suitable for himself. Sylvester and he could not come to terms. Balch brought up from San Francisco the frame of a lumber building suitable for a large sized store. He landed part if not all of it on the beach here for the purpose of erecting it for a store. He afterwards put it on board his vessel again and went to Steilacoom with it. But the goods he brought up he left here and Henry C. Wilson (16) had charge of the store and sold the goods here; until he got the building put up at Steilacoom. The balance of the goods were taken down there.

Dr. Maynard, who started Seattle, resided in Olympia sometime before he went to Seattle. He came either in 1851 or 1852; I think probably in 1851 he crossed the plains. He must have been here over a year, probably two years. He was practicing medicine. (17) Maynard was married and left a wife in the states. Mrs. Maynard had half the claim and he had half. In the last few years, his first wife and son came out. I am of the impression that a portion of the claim that the second Mrs. Maynard held was not of good title. I think she lost it. (18) Maynard was the first man to settle there according to my knowledge; it was called after an Indian Chief that he was very friendly with. (19) He was a fine old man, too, old man Seattle. He seemed to be a good dispositioned man. He was a large, portly old man with good features.

When I called at the Hudson's Bay Office at Victoria, Governor Douglas (20) had a very comfortable seat not far from the fire. It happened that there was a long table between us and the fire, and it was a rather cold day. It sort of impressed me; I think I can see the picture of it now. It rather looked to me as though there would have been impropriety in moving the table away a little to allow those parties to have some of the benefit of a good fire on a cold day in December, along about Christmas time.

In regard to the hardy character of the Indians when I came out here, and how they could stand cold weather. I may mention that vessel the "Orbit" when she was being loaded with some lumber that was brought down from Tumwater; and she lay down here in the middle of the bay. The lumber was rafted down by the Indians. There was about two and one half feet of snow on the ground and the water was pretty tolerable cold. Well, they worked rafting that lumber in the water, and putting it on board the vessel, sometimes up to their knees in water without any clothing on them except a piece of blanket or something of that sort tied around their middle and they stood it very well. I know that several of us that were looking at them were shivering with the cold.

John Swan Interview—Notes

- 1- Francis Tarbell was another early arrival to Olympia. He was an insurance agent in downtown Olympia and served in a number of elected positions, including as Territorial Treasurer, 1875-1880.
- 2-The Hudson's Bay Company had extensive operations in the Pacific Northwest prior to American settlement. Fort Nisqually near present day Dupont was the center for their fur trapping and agricultural activities extending throughout present Pierce and Thurston Counties.
- 3- John Work was employed of the Hudson's Bay Company 1823-1861 as a clerk and trader. During his tenure he traveled extensively and participated in the Bonaventure (Sacramento) River Expedition of 1833 into northern California, seeking new sources of furs. In 1854 he was assigned to Fort Nisqually which was in the process of divesting its assets in Washington Territory.
- 4- James Marshall discovered gold while constructing the millrace for John Sutter's Mill in 1848.
- 5- The Gold Rush on the Fraser River, British Columbia was in 1858.
- 6- Most likely diarrhea.
- 7- When news of the 1848 Gold Strike reached Puget Sound, many settlers to set out for the mines, including Isaac N. Ebey, B.F. Shaw, Edmund Sylvester and George Moore. When their dreams of riches didn't "pan out," they purchased the brig *Orbit* to carry themselves and saleable goods back to Puget Sound with the plan to open a mercantile at what is now Olympia.
- 8- Edmund Sylvester claimed what is now the site of Olympia jointly with Levi Smith. Smith died in 1848 and Sylvester became the sole owner.
- 9- Michael Troutman Simmons arrived in 1845 with the Simmons-Bush Party and helped found the first American settlement on Puget Sound at Tumwater falls.
- 10- Originally called "New Market." They chose the site for its proximity to saltwater for shipping and the water-power potential of Tumwater Falls.
- 11- Captain Clanrick Crosby was a Maine sea captain who relocated with his family to New Market on the advice of his brother Nathaniel, also a sea captain. Nathaniel's 1860 home survives in Tumwater as Crosby House Museum.
- 12- The brig *Grecian* which Crosby purchased specifically for the voyage.
- 13- Simmons and Smith's store was located near the corner of present Thurston Ave and Capitol Way. This was the waterfront of Olympia prior to extensive fill-

ing.

- 14- Swan is apparently disregarding the several Squaxin dwellings that were located at what is now Fourth Avenue and Columbia Streets.
- 15- Lafayette Balch was also a Maine sea captain. He founded the settlement of Steilacoom, which became the territory's first incorporated town.
- 16- Henry C. Wilson later became one of the earliest settlers in Port Townsend, Washington.
- 17- Dr. David Swinson Maynard (1808-1873) earned money cutting cordwood for sale in Olympia until relocated to Duwamps (now Seattle) in 1852. He later sold his claim which included much of what is now the Pioneer Square District after natives attacked Seattle during the 1856 Indian War and relocated to a farm in what is now West Seattle.
- 18- The personal life of "Doc" Maynard was the source of much public gossip among the pioneers. Maynard left his first wife on the east coast when he came west to search for gold. On the Oregon Trail he met the recently widowed Catherine Broshears. Broshears was Michael T. Simmons' sister and her party was on their way to join Simmons in Tumwater. Maynard agreed to accompany the party to Tumwater, where he continued to court Broshears. Maynard petitioned the Oregon Territorial government to grant him status as a single person, based on a sworn statement by Maynard that they understood as evidence his first wife was no longer living. The territory granted the petition, and Maynard and Broshears married. However, when the first Mrs. Maynard arrived in Seattle, Maynard's marriage to Broshears was dissolved.
- 19- Duwamish leader Sealth for whom Seattle is named spent a great deal of time on Budd Inlet as it was an important food gathering area used by a number of tribes. Sealth was baptized by the Catholic missionaries at Priest's Point and took the Christian name Noah. He suggested to Maynard that the east side of Elliot Bay was a good site for a homestead, and accompanied Maynard when he traveled there to claim the land.
- 20- Sir James Douglas, K.C.B. (1803-1877) governed the colony of Vancouver Island from 1851-1864. Prior to his governorship, Douglas served as accountant and chief trader at the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. During his governorship, Douglas supervised the colonization of Vancouver Island and later inland British Columbia; managed the influx of gold seekers during the 1858 Fraser River Gold Rush, and dispatched troops to San Juan Island during the 1859 boundary dispute with the US commonly known as the "Pig War."

Meet the 2008 Olympia Historical Society Board

The current Olympia Historical Society board members represent diverse interests in local historical research. Here are brief description of their interests and current work:

Roger Easton— In addition to his volunteering weekly for State Archives, and SW Regional Archives, Roger is winding up a 2-year project researching for Pulitzer Prize winning author Richard Kluger, on his upcoming book on the 1855-56 Indian Wars in Washington Territory, particularly the roles of Territorial Indian Agent and Governor Isaac Stevens, Leschi, and the Nisqually Tribe. He also helps with research for an upcoming book on the history of the Tumwater School District by Don Trosper. Roger is a member of the Tumwater History Committee, sponsored by the Tumwater School District, and has been helping to find relevant documents. Roger also serves on the Olympia, Lacey and Thurston County Historic Commissions, the Ruddell Pioneer Cemetery board, and as President of the Bigelow House Preservation Association board. Also, Roger has a new video on the infamous Territorial Prison at Seatco (Bucoda) airing on local access channel 22 from time to time. This was a spring-off from another video on the History of Bucoda. The research led him to many up-to-now unknown finds, which appear in the video. Roger's website is at: www.WaResearcher.com

Edward Echtle is a professional researcher focusing on labor, immigration, civil rights, and community issues. He also serves on the Bigelow House Museum board. Ed is currently a partner in Chew Communications, working as a historical research and documentation consultant: www.chewcommunications.com. Most recently Ed is heading the preservation of the historic Yick Fung Chinese Mercantile for the Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle.

Lois Fenske— This calendar year, Lois gave two presentations to the Newcomers' Club that meets at the Olympia Center. "Olympia's Changing Shorelines," and "The History of Women's Suffrage in the State of Washington." She was involved in the research and writing of "Mid-Twentieth Century Olympia: A Context Statement on Local History and Modern Architecture, 1945-1975," while a member of the Olympia Heritage Commission. Lois is a retired Economics professor from South Puget Sound Community College. Her historical interests are: Genealogy and Family History, Business and Economic history, History of Higher Education, History of Fashion, Architectural History and History of Automobiles.

Susan Goff— Sue is an avid local historian and researcher. She is the principle caretaker of the OHS artifact and document collection. Most recently she has headed the processing of the Bigelow House collection, preparing items for use by researchers.

Deb Ross— Deb is a local historian and new to the OHS board. Currently working on an historical novel based on the lives of Konrad and Albertina Schneider, early settlers in Bush Prairie, West Olympia and Mud Bay. (Schneider's Prairie and two Schneider's Creeks)

Rianne Perry— Rianne is also a new OHS board member. Previously she worked as a museum assistant director and is employed currently as a Contracts Consultant for the State of Washington. In addition to serving on the OHS board of directors, she is also a board member with the Bigelow House Museum. As a volunteer for the Olympia Heritage Commission, she is presently assisting with the city's upcoming Historic Preservation Forum on May 3. She is also involved in the Bigelow Highlands Neighborhood Association and is enjoying projects on her 1912 home on "Workingman's Hill."

Lanny Weaver— Lanny is an archivist at the Southwest Regional Branch of the Waswill be giving a power point presentation on researching historic property, at the History Forum on May 5 at Washington Center The presentation features using various types of records, but concentrating on what is available at the Southwest Regional Archives. A researcher will learn how to discover the age of a historic structure, the names of the owners, including the original one, the appearance of the structure and perhaps a fun fact or two.