



# THE OLYMPIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

SPRING 2009

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings,

Please join me in welcoming Ralph Blankenship and Russ Hupe as new members of the board of the Olympia Historical Society. Russ has graciously taken over the duties of Vice President.

Because this year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Olympia, we will be collaborating with the city on two different events in lieu of our regular general membership meetings. The first, tentatively scheduled for May 16<sup>th</sup> at the Washington State Archives, will feature historic documents from Thurston County preserved in the Archives and a program revealing the origins of Olympia area place names.

The second, tentatively scheduled for August 22<sup>nd</sup>, takes us back to Priest Point Park, where in 2005 the Olympia Historical Society presented historical displays to illustrate the 100 years of the park. In the planning stages for this year are more activities, including musicians specializing in pioneer tunes.

Future Olympia Historical Society bulletins will contain suggestions as to how we can all become more involved in these events.



Capitol Campus / Photo by Merle Junk, 1955

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THE OLYMPIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

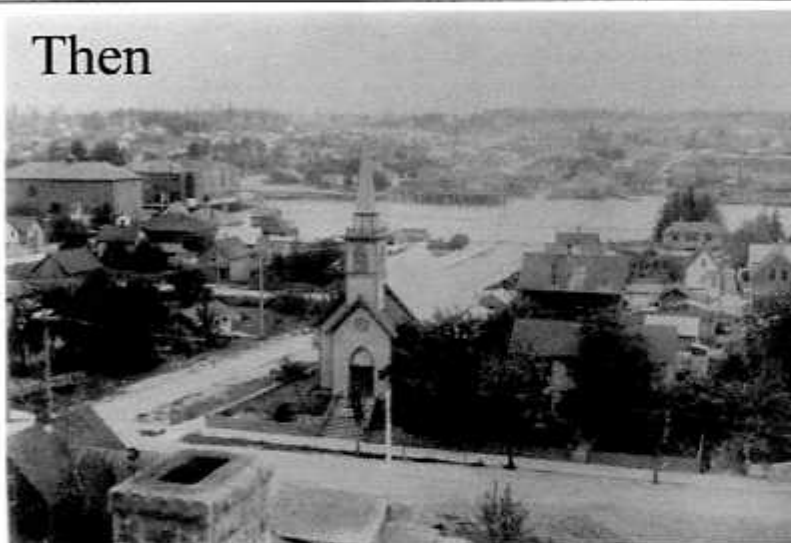
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Then



Now



## WHERE WAS *THAT*?

This photo has puzzled historians for some time. We now know the spot from which it was taken. Believe it or not, the photographer was standing atop the Old Thurston County Courthouse, which became the State Capitol Building after a wing was added. The County couldn't afford to pay for the newly finished building, which was completed in the midst of a severe depression, and was forced to sell it to the State. You are looking at the 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church, built in 1860, at the SW Corner of Franklin and Legion Way.

The wing to the East of the building was constructed ca. 1890, so this photo would have been taken about 1889. Note Legion Way drops off abruptly at a wide expanse of water (The Swantown Slough, which was filled in after 1912). The street begins on the other side climbing up the Eastside, as it does now. See page 10 for the same photo with labels.

The "Now" photo was shot from as close a point from the roof of the of the newer addition the original photo was taken. The Armory can be seen. This was the exact site of the first Washington School at Legion and Eastside St., which you can see in the original photo. Roger wants you to know he risked life and limb for the good of the Society to get this photo!!

### THE OLYMPIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**President**  
Lanny Weaver

**Vice President/Secretary**  
Deb Ross

**Treasurer**  
Lois Fenske

**Board Members**  
Roger Easton  
Sue Goff  
Ralph Blankenship  
Russell "Russ" Hupe

**Newsletter Editors**  
Roger Easton & Sean Krier

## Stump the Board!

Why does it say "Sunset" in the Sidewalk on Legion Way between Franklin and Adams? What happened to First, Second and Third Avenue? What was the "Pagan Frolic?" What's the deal with the totem pole where Capitol Lake drains into Budd Inlet?

Do you have a question about Olympia History? Ask the Society! We'll do our best to answer whatever questions come our way. Just send in your query by email or post and we'll put our crack team of history experts on it. We'll print the questions and the answers in upcoming issues of the Olympia Historical Society Quarterly.



In Honor of the City of Olympia's 150th Birthday  
and in conjunction with the  
Humanities Washington "Inquiring Mind" Program

**RAYMOND EGAN** will portray  
**FATHER LUIGI ROSSI**

Saturday **MARCH 21, 2009**

at **7 P.M.** at **ORCA BOOKS**

509 E. 4th Ave. in Olympia (This is a free event!)

**WHO WAS FATHER LUIGI ROSSI?**

Father Luigi Rossi was a missionary, chaplain, pioneer and story-teller. He arrived in Olympia in 1856 while the Civil War was being fought in the United States (Washington was not yet a part of the United States). He spent the next six years travelling from Olympia to Admiralty Inlet to Semiahmoo Bay and Port Townsend and back, mostly by canoe or horseback, sometimes by sail or steamer. In 1862, Father Rossi, worn out by his travails, went back to his home in Europe to recover his health.

*Please don't miss this opportunity to hear what we are sure will be interesting and often exciting stories about Father Rossi's experiences. He will also answer your questions about what Olympia was like for him back in the mid-1800s.*



This event is part of a series that celebrates Olympia's 150th Birthday. For more information, contact the City of Olympia at 753-8325, or see our web site: [www.olympiawa.gov/events](http://www.olympiawa.gov/events). Go to Olympia's 150th Birthday for a complete calendar of events as well as interesting information and photos about Olympia history.

# “THE EARLY YEARS OF SOUTH PUGET SOUND COMMUNITY COLLEGE: 1957 THROUGH DECEMBER 1970”

An excerpt from *A History of South Puget Sound Community College (1957 to 2006)*

By Lois J. Fenske

## INTRODUCTION

The roots of South Puget Sound Community College are in technical education. Although Olympia Vocational Technical Institute, as it was originally called, was officially established in 1962, its roots go back to at least 1957 when the Olympia School Board wanted to expand adult education opportunities in the Olympia area. Dr. Leslie Armstrong, an instructor at Olympia High School, was named part-time director of the adult education program which was housed at the old Olympia High School on Capitol Way in downtown Olympia. When classes started in 1957, 370 students had registered by the first two nights. By 1958, 816 adults were taking classes. The need was apparently there.

In the Spring of 1961, a group of Olympia citizens made a survey of the area served educationally by the Olympia School District. The results of the survey indicated a need for a more structured form of technical education to support the offices of the government of the State of Washington as well as local businesses. The outgrowth of the survey was the decision to establish the Olympia Vocational Technical Institute in 1962. The Institute was housed in the old Montgomery Ward Building at 317 East 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue in downtown Olympia. William Villines, a retired naval officer, was named full-time Director. Larry Shull was hired to oversee the electronic data processing courses with Howard Bullpitt as the instructor. Among the other original faculty were Josephine Martin, Lorraine Lamp, Virginia Russell, Lyzena Sharar, Katherine Allard, and Beverly Swarthout. Jackie Amburgey, Marlene Latta and Eleanor Neal joined the staff a year later.

Jo Martin, an Olympia native who taught shorthand and typing, remembers well the old Montgomery Ward Building. It was decrepit even when she was a child and it was in considerably worse shape when Olympia Voc-Tech took it over. Jo said, “The ceilings quite often moved.”

The mascot for the voc-tech was a turtle named “OVIE” and the school motto was “Plodding wins the race.” The students called themselves “Techites” and the yearbooks during these early years, the *Turtle Tales*, indicate that there was tremendous school spirit and pride. Although the facilities were somewhat lacking, the camaraderie among the administrators, faculty and students was considerable. Lunch at the Spar Restaurant down the street was a common occurrence.



The school responded to the community, adding and changing programs as needed. In 1962, there were 95 students in office/clerical, secretarial and electronic data processing. By September 1966, technical training was expanded to 14 fields, including stenography, cashier-checker retail and horticulture which was offered through Briggs Nursery. In October 1966, Dr. Leslie Armstrong was named Director, succeeding Villines.

## CENTRALIA COLLEGE

But the history of Olympia Voc-Tech cannot be told without also considering the history of Centralia College. Two events occurred during the 1960's that would forever change the Olympia school. First, in 1966 Dr. Nels Hanson was named President of Centralia College, responsible to the Centralia School District Superintendent, Dr. Kenneth Mallery. And secondly, in 1967, with the passage of

the Community College Act, District 12, encompassing Lewis and Thurston counties, was created. Centralia College was in the newly created District 12.

Until 1963 local communities in the State of Washington through their local school districts supported their junior colleges, as they were then called. Certainly in the case of Centralia College, there was a financial commitment by the community – in particular the business community – to support its college, even during the hard financial times of the Great Depression of the 1930's. Centralia College has been and is today the intellectual and cultural center of the Centralia/Chehalis area. Its importance in that community cannot be overemphasized.



Although Olympia Voc-Tech had been established specifically for technical education, Centralia College's roots were in academic education. In fact, in the early years, Centralia College specifically designed its courses to be the same as those at the University of Washington and in most cases used the same textbooks. University of Washington faculty would visit the college regularly to observe the classes taught at Centralia College to make sure that the level of instruction was of high enough quality to transfer the credits to the University of Washington.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACT**

One of the provisions of the Community College Act of 1967 authorized the merging of vocational-technical schools in a service area with the newly established community colleges. (Olympia Voc-Tech and Centralia College were, of course, in the

same service area.) The other option for the vocational schools was to remain under the control of their local school districts. This latter option was taken by the Olympia School District and Olympia Voc-Tech remained under its control. However, by November 1968, the Olympia School Board was having second thoughts about the voc-tech and was considering that Centralia College (District 12) should take over its administration.

#### **PROTESTS**

Other people had different views. On November 14, 1968, Olympia Voc-Tech Director, Robert Boyden, as well as the faculty and students, indicated that they wanted the school to remain with the Olympia School District. Students marched in the streets of Olympia with large banners that proclaimed "Keep OVTI in Olympia." It was assumed that the school would be moved to the Centralia area. (The move could very well have come about.) The fear was also that Olympia area students would be short-changed and that tuition would be three times higher, going from \$25 to \$75 a quarter. Boyden claimed that many students able to benefit from the training at Olympia Voc-Tech would be ineligible to even attend Centralia College in that there would be stricter entrance requirements, including restricted age and the necessity of a high school diploma. "Further," Boyden was quoted, "many vocationally directed students have neither the desire nor need to take the many additional and, for them, irrelevant courses which will be required under community college standards for a "well-rounded education." He continued, "So the school asks the question: Why trifle with a program which is such an obvious asset to the community and permit its control to be moved to a less central location and be operated under conditions which will possibly preclude those most in need of vocational help?" (Even today, the argument is heard as to the efficacy of requiring general education in technical programs.)

#### **OPTIONS**

The Olympia School District knew that if they opted to keep Olympia Voc-Tech there would be less funding available for expansion than if the voc-tech came under the control of the community

college system. And under either jurisdiction, Olympia Voc-Tech desperately needed to expand, in space, equipment and new technical programs to meet the needs of the community.

On November 25, 1968, a public meeting was called by the Olympia School Board to discuss the two options. According to an article in the Olympian, Centralia College was anxious to get the Olympia Voc-Tech programs which would represent "a sizeable financial plum and would likely help Centralia College remain at full student strength even though many of its academic students would probably be drawn to Olympia's Evergreen State College scheduled to open in 1970." It was apparently not realized at this time that a very different type of college was planned for Olympia's West Side and that the kind of student who had traditionally attended Centralia College would not necessarily attend The Evergreen State College.

The Olympia School District tended toward ridding itself of Olympia Voc-Tech but there was strong opposition, including Esther Knox, a long-time Olympia School Board member, who was vehemently against Centralia College gaining control of the voc-tech.

Nel Hanson, President of Community College District 12, attended the packed meeting in November 1968 to answer questions about transferring Olympia Voc-Tech to District 12. At the December 16, 1968 Board meeting, the Olympia School Board voted to maintain control of Olympia Voc-Tech within the local school district – voting three to one with one abstention. Voting to pass up an option to transfer the school to the regional community college system were Esther Knox, John Hendricks and Charles Grover. Each expressed the belief that local control would better ensure the interests of local vocational students. Board member Lloyd Wolford expressed a minority viewpoint, supported by Board Chairman Jack Dunn. Wolford said that when the issue is divested of emotional content and cleared of "honest misunderstanding," he believed the vocational school would operate equally well under local or regional control in the immediate future. But, said Wolford, he thought it possible that, in the extendable future, Olympia Voc-Tech would better

thrive under the community college system, and at less cost to local taxpayers. All five directors agreed that no other single decision had caused them more in-depth study and soul-searching.

#### **DISTRICT 12 AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION**

In the meantime, in 1969 the Board of Trustees of District 12, representing the citizens of the entire two-county district, adopted a Master Plan for the 70's, developed with assistance from Tadlock Associates, Inc., an educational planning firm. The plan recognized the need for District 12 to provide technical education opportunities for adults in Lewis and Thurston counties.

The District, under Dr. Hanson's direction, began to pursue ways to meet this technical education need and started looking at parcels of land located between Centralia and Olympia to house Centralia College in more spacious surroundings and also to accommodate technical education through Olympia Voc-Tech which would logically be the technical component. (There was little room for expansion in the center of Centralia.)

#### **CENTRALIA COLLEGE REMAINS IN DOWNTOWN CENTRALIA**

But the Centralia Chronicle and the Twin City (Centralia and Chehalis) Chamber of Commerce fought to prevent Centralia College's move out of the center of Centralia. Public hearings were held to discuss whether the college would expand at its present location or secure property elsewhere in the area to establish a new campus. The people of Centralia won and the college remained in downtown Centralia. Fortunately, Centralia High School (next door to the college) moved to a new location which allowed Centralia College to acquire that property which doubled the land size of the college. In her history, Centralia College: 50 Years of Growing, 1925 to 1975, Katharine Kemp states, "The decision made was a most important one in the history of the college and dictates the future for the college." She was right, but she didn't realize how important the decision would be and in what way.

In a letter to the Editor of the Centralia Chronicle in 1985, a Centralia resident recalls what happened in

the community at the time. "It was clearly evident to those best qualified to make such a decision that retaining the present location [of Centralia College in downtown Centralia] could lead to nothing but trouble somewhere down the road....Moving the campus out of town was a must if Centralia College was to continue its strong academic programs while at the same time expanding its vocational offerings to the area it serves....Unfortunately, as it happens so often, a powerful few of our citizens could not and did not see the lay of the landscape down the road."

Possibly if a site between Centralia and Olympia had been acquired for a combination campus, there may not have been the resulting turmoil. The history of each college would have been completely different.

Apparently, when it was determined that Centralia College would remain in downtown Centralia, Nels Hanson began to pursue the acquisition of land in Olympia for his technical education center's future location. Presumably this center would be Olympia Voc-Tech.

#### **INTERIM CONTROL OF OLYMPIA VOC-TECH**

The battle for control of Olympia Voc-Tech went on for another year. By December 1969, a decision was made. An agreement between the Board of Directors of the Olympia School District and the Board of Trustees of Community College District

12 was adopted on December 8, 1969, which was as follows:

On a motion by Director Dunn, the Board moved that the Olympia School District No. 111 enter into negotiations with the Centralia Community College District No. 12 for the purpose of contracting with them for the operation of OVTI in the Olympia Metropolitan areas, for the school year 1970-71.

From July 1, 1970 to June 30, 1971 a trial period was established during which District 12 operated Olympia Voc-Tech with funds from the Olympia

School District. If the arrangement worked out, the school would be permanently under District 12 administration. If not, it would be returned to the Olympia School District. Nels Hanson had played a major role in the events that would seriously affect Olympia Voc-Tech, Centralia College and District 12's future. The interim agreement signed in December 1969 was the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the Olympia school.

#### **THE MOTTMAN ROAD CAMPUS**

In the December 8 agreement, certain criteria were established regarding permanent transfer of Olympia Voc-Tech to District 12. One was that the integrity of the instructional program to the faculty, the students, and the community would be maintained. Evidence of this would be that "...the purchase of an adequate site on which to permanently house OVTI in the Olympia metropolitan areas has either been completed or is definitely in process. This site is to be no less than 48.5 acres;...."



The Legislative Budget Committee met on December 21, 1969, at which concern was expressed about the proposed purchase by Centralia Community College of a 100 acre site in Olympia purportedly to be utilized as a 'satellite campus,' [The words of the legislative committee.] Centralia had petitioned the State Board for Community College Education to purchase the site (the so-called "Mottman Tract") for approximately \$250,000. On January 11, 1970, the Legislative Budget Committee met again and devoted the entire

