



**OLYMPIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND BIGELOW HOUSE MUSEUM
2023 ANNUAL REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL**

In looking back over the past year, it gives me great pleasure to report to Mayor Selby and City Council Members that the Olympia Historical Society-Bigelow House Museum (OHS-BHM) continues to show itself as an effective voice for local heritage. 2022 has been a year where the organization has successfully drawn upon partnerships, creativity, and the dedication of our volunteers and board members to move forward in achieving our mission.

As in every year, appreciation is extended to OHS-BHM Board of Trustees members and volunteers. Outside our organization, many other individuals and organizations merit a word of gratitude for their interest and support. At City Hall, thanks go to Marygrace Goddu, Olympia Historic Preservation Officer, who generously gives her time to guide our interactions with city government and welcomes OHS-BHM to the table on important local heritage issues. Huge thanks also go to the Olympia Parks, Arts, and Recreation Department (OPARD) personnel for maintaining the museum property and adjoining Bigelow Springs Park as well as work to re-use the Armory. We also acknowledge and thank City Manager Jay Burney for taking his valuable time to meet with OHS-BHM board members in September to discuss potential relocation of its collections to the Armory for display, research, and maintenance.

In 2022, OHS-BHM continued to benefit from our strong partnership on several efforts. Key partners include the Thurston County Historical Commission (TCHC), Washington State Historical Society (WSHS) and the Arts & Heritage Alliance (AHA).

There are many others to thank for their contributions to the OHS-BHM in 2022. We look forward to continuing these partnerships in 2023 and beyond.

Following are summary comments on selected OHS-BHM accomplishments in 2022:

Events and Programs: OHS-BHM met with significant success in bringing heritage programming to our community. Just a few of many highlights include the following:

- In February during Black History Month, OHS-BHM hosted the dedication ceremony for the Howard Point Interpretive Marker on the Bigelow House front lawn. Inspired by African American pioneers Alexander and Rebecca Howard, AHA and the Olympia Heritage Commission (OHC) created and funded the interpretive marker installed on East Bay Drive. An estimated 70+ persons huddled under tents in the rain to listen to a line-up of distinguished speakers including**

Howard family descendants, Dr. Thelma Jackson, Charlene Krise of Squaxin Island Tribe, Historian Ed Echtle, and City Councilmember Dontae Payne. In addition to the speakers, AHA, OHC staff Marygrace Goddu, and Thurston County, appreciation is extended to the Bigelow Neighborhood Association and OHS-BHM board members and volunteers for organizing the event.

- In 2020, OHS-BHM entered into an agreement with the Thurston County Commissioners to act as distributors of the TCHC's county history book *Water, Woods, and Prairies* (WW&P). Major success realized in distributing the book during the first year resulted in the agreement being extended to 2024 together with a revised and reprinted edition of the book. In this innovative arrangement, OHS-BHM took possession of book copies with the promise to distribute copies free-of-charge to our partner heritage organizations throughout the county and to Tribal entities.**
- Spring of 2022 marked the culmination of OHS-BHM's Armory Storytelling project. Working under contract with the WA Military Department (WMD), OHS-BHM created the Armory Storytelling project to commemorate the role of the National Guard in the community. The focus of the project included development of an OHS-BHM hosted website to which anyone could log into and record their personal association with the building. Other elements included production of a video.**
- With transfer of the Armory, the City launched a broad based public outreach effort to gather ideas for how the building should be re-purposed for community use. In conjunction with that, OHS-BHM submitted a proposal to the City Manager in fall of 2022 requesting that space in the Armory be set aside for housing OHS-BHM collections either on a long-term or interim basis.**
- Over the course of the spring and into summer, the board completed a process to update the OHS-BHM 2019 Strategic Plan. Find a copy of the updated strategic plan attached to this report.**
- Over the past year, OHS-BHM has demonstrated support for greater awareness of Native American presence and contribution to our region's history and culture. With guidance from board member Charlene Krise, a land acknowledgement statement was adopted by the board in July and posted on our website. OHS-BHM also supported re-naming Priest Point Park to Squaxin Park, an effort led by Charlene and the Squaxin Island Tribal Council.**
- In July, OHS-BHM received a Diversity in Local History (DLH) grant from WSHS. The purpose of the grant is to support the work of history student interns to advance their career in history while elevating the knowledge and appreciation for the contributions of communities heretofore under-represented in local history narratives. The DLH grant to the society will pay for the work of a St. Martins University History major to research and design a marker at Squaxin Park that**

interprets the Squaxin Island Tribe's presence on park land and the South Sound region.

- In August, 20 persons participated in a walking tour of the Bigelow Neighborhood. Scripted and narrated by board member and neighborhood resident Paul Parker, highlights of the tour included the Howard Point marker, the Olympia Avenue Historic District, Working Man's Hill and Bigelow Springs Park.
- OHS-BHM was also an active participant in local events including but not limited to:
 - ❖ The March celebration of transfer of the Armory to the City of Olympia.
 - ❖ In June, book launch of *Water, Woods, & Prairies* at the Olympia Center.
 - ❖ Televised interview of OHS-BHM board members Gerry Alexander and Greg Griffith on Thurston Community Media.
 - ❖ In August, the Thurston County Fair and downtown LovOlyFest.
 - ❖ KGY centennial celebration picnic with 100-year award presentation to KGY manager Nick Kerry and staff.
 - ❖ Heritage Day on October 8 hosted by TCHC at Thurston County Fairgrounds.
 - ❖ Attended monthly meetings of the South Sound Heritage Association.

Bigelow House Museum and Grounds

Although the museum has been closed to visitors since March 2020, much activity has been happening inside and out. I am delighted to report that grant-funded rehabilitation work has been completed to preserve and interpret the house as the city's only history museum. Following are a few highlights:

- A generous grant from the Mary P. Dolciani Halloran Foundation has resulted in the transformative restoration of Margaret Bigelow's second floor bedroom and upstairs hallway. Also completed is conversion of a former kitchen for display and interpretive purposes. Many thanks go to the Dolciani Halloran Foundation and board member David Goularte for their major commitment to this project.
- In tandem with the 2nd floor restoration work was the drafting of a new house tour narrative and interpretation plan. Earlier this year, historic preservationist Michelle Thompson stepped forward to volunteer her time to help OHS-BHM rethink the themes, stories, and artifacts to be shared in a newly scripted tour for museum visitors to enjoy. Michelle worked closely with Shanna Stevenson, Ron Locke, and David Goularte to craft the new narrative that we plan to share with visitors in 2023.
- Thanks to a Heritage Grant awarded from the TCHC, OHS-BHM was able to construct five storm windows at the Bigelow House. OHS-BHM has prioritized storm windows in order to protect the historic windows from weather as well as to save on energy costs.

- Also completed during the summer was work supported by a state capital budget grant from the 2021 Washington State Legislature. Grant funded work at the house included replacement of the 1990s era boiler and application of a new coat of white paint to the exterior. Selected contractor Northwest Painter Cooperative, carefully removed multiple layers of lead-based paint down to bare wood. For this important funding, it is important to acknowledge and thank our 22nd Legislative District delegation.

External Programming

As the crown jewel of OHS-BHM collections, maintaining and restoring the Bigelow House and grounds absorbs much of the time, energy and resources of board members, our volunteers, and partners. However, OHS-BHM has also been active throughout 2021 in other local heritage issues and initiatives. A summary on a few of these initiatives include the following:

- At our 2022 Annual Membership Meeting, OHS-BHM recognized the centennial of three Olympia organizations: the Port of Olympia and local Kiwanis and Lions Club chapters. Also honored was long-time heritage advocate and OHS-BHM board member Charlie Roe. In August, OHS-BHM gave a special award to radio station KGY for achieving 100 years of broadcasting.
- Author and Historian Deb Ross continued work on behalf of OHS-BHM to maintain the “Many Voices” webpage on our website (olympiahistory.org). The Many Voices webpage links researchers to other websites focusing on the heritage of under-represented groups and cultures. Deb also continues in her role with OHS-BHM by creating the “Looking Back” feature of captioned historic photographs published in the Sunday Olympian.
- This summer, OHS-BHM tasked website developer 20 Miles North with re-designing our website in appearance and functionality. This project successfully refreshed the webpage with new colors, crisp format, and easier navigation. Explore the refreshed website (olympiahistory.org) and feel free to share any comments.
- OHS-BHM along with the City of Olympia and several other heritage organizations and local jurisdictions, collectively continue to support the publication of the Thurston County Historical Journal. OHS-BHM proudly provides copies of the journal as a benefit of society membership. Our thanks go to OHS-BHM and TCHC board member Charlie Roe whose initiative and interest in history resulted in publication of the journal starting in 2016. Also recognized and thanked for their dedication to publication of each edition is Editor Karen Johnson, the Editorial Committee comprised of Drew Crooks, Jennifer Crooks, James Hannum and Erin Quinn Valcho, plus the ongoing support of the Olympia-Tumwater Foundation.

- **The historical society’s collection of documents, photographs, and objects related to Olympia’s past continues to grow under the meticulous eye of volunteer curator Susan Goff. We received a variety of donations ranging from the 1870s to 2022. Of particular note is a circa 1900 promotional flyer attributed to the Chamber of Commerce. As always, many thanks to Susan for her continued dedication to seeing that collection items are catalogued and protected.**

In closing, OHS-BHM expresses our sincere thanks to Mayor Selby, City Council Members, and City staff for continued support (both financial and otherwise). As we enjoy the glow of our many achievements in 2022, OHS-BHM looks forward to engaging with you in 2023 in fulfilling our mission to preserve, share, and interpret our rich heritage. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

**Respectfully Submitted,
Greg Griffith, President**

Attachment: Strategic Plan

**Strategic Plan
Olympia Historical Society and Bigelow House Museum**

I. Enhance visibility through increased programming, events and outreach in the community.

A. Increase programming and events.

- 1. Provide downtown and neighborhood walking tours.**
- 2. Engage with History Happy Hours when restarted.**
- 3. Plan events to bring visitors back to the Bigelow House.**
 - a. Hold open house upon re-opening.**
 - b. Develop a “passport” for visitors to use in visiting and learning about different parts of the property.**
- 4. Brainstorm ideas, including virtual options, as substitutes for the Holiday Home Tour.**
- 5. Implement new interpretive plan for the Bigelow House.**
 - a. Develop a vision.**
 - b. Assure accessibility.**
 - c. Train docents.**
- 6. Renew efforts to secure Washington State Diversity in Local History grant.**

B. Increase outreach.

- 1. Provide an annual “State of the OHS&BHM” summary to the city council, mayor and staff and extend an invitation to tour the Bigelow House.**
- 2. Engage with the Bigelow Neighborhood Association.**
- 3. Develop revised guidelines and criteria for a scholarship, funded by interest on the Easton bequest, for availability to students, teachers, or both.**
- 4. Appoint outreach committee to develop new outreach strategies and to assist as needed with development of the new website.**
- 5. Conduct outreach to education community and school groups to make OHS&BHM available as a history resource.**
- 6. Continue to build our relationship with the Squaxin Tribe.**

IV. Develop a revenue stream that will produce budget for paid staff.

A. Develop methods for increasing revenue.

- 1. Develop strategies to enlarge membership base including, but not limited to, member incentives (including discounts for new and renewing members on the Water, Woods and Prairie book, TCTV, and partnerships with other organizations.**
- 2. Seek and implement strategies for annual business and corporate sponsorships.**
- 3. Research grants, including Inspire Olympia funds, that allow funding of staff.**
- 4. Approach city for financial support for operating, programming and building maintenance.**
- 5. Develop a fundraising “back up plan” with other fundraising options.**

B. Update staff and volunteer needs.

- 1. Update assessment of basic or minimum staff needs and requirements, as well as ideal requirements, in the areas of administration, technology, board support, media and communication, events and programming, and membership development, so that we are positioned to act when revenue is available.**
- 2. Develop staff job description.**
- 3. Develop volunteer job description.**
- 4. Develop board member job description.**

C. Recruit new docents.

- 1. Develop strategies.**
- 2. Develop fall back plan using board docents.**

V. Enhance internal systems to assure viability of our organization and the Bigelow House into the future.

A. Board structure

- 1. Reassess how we recruit board members.**
 - a. Analyze skills needed.**
 - b. Review option of using an application process.**
 - c. Recruit from membership.**
- 2. Diversify board**
 - a. Outreach to high schools and colleges.**
 - b. Outreach to communities of color.**

B. Bigelow House infrastructure

- 1. Develop a priority list of maintenance projects.**
 - 2. Develop a list of capital needs and capital grant options.**
 - 3. Enhance security by researching and installing, if warranted, security cameras, wi-fi, and sprinklers.**
- 4. Seek grants to restore/rehabilitate BHM and grounds.**