WHERE THE POTHOLES ARE

BY
MARY ANN BIGELOW

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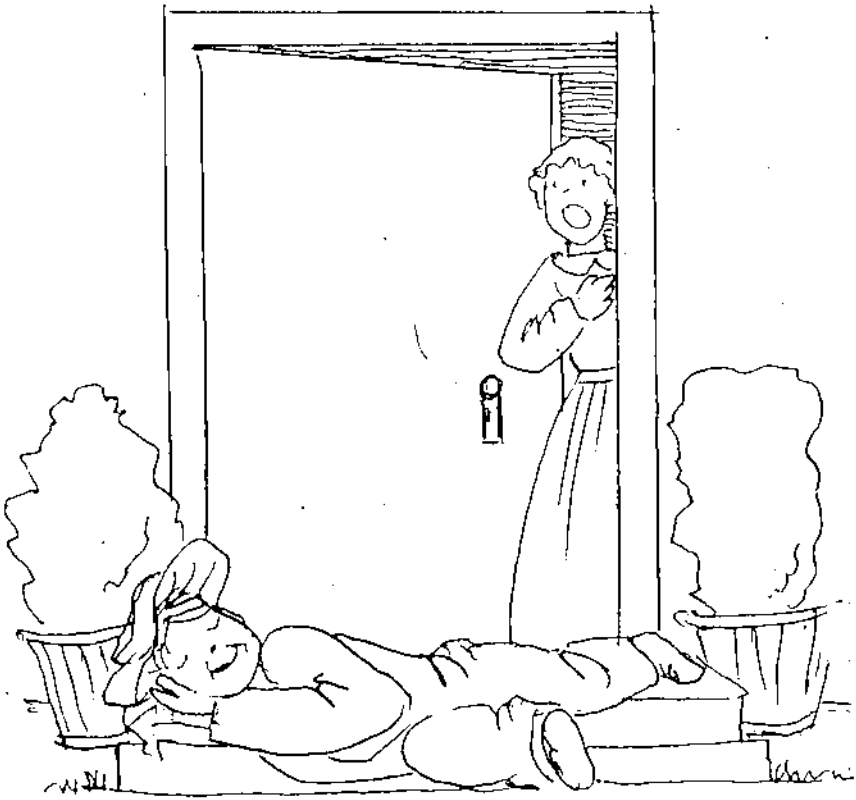
About the Author:

Mary Ann Campbell Bigelow, a native of Western Washington, has seen many changes as well as the unchanging charm of this corner of the United States, and continues to be excited by it. She and her husband Daniel, upon their marriage in 1935, moved into the historic family home built in 1854 and continuously occupied by the family since then. Their four sons and families live in the area and the house, now a National Landmark, is open for tours with Mrs. Bigelow as tour guide.

She is a practicing artist, a speaker and a long-time folksinger, but most of all, enjoys telling the school children who tour the house, How It Was in Those Days.

Other works: Is Your Child Ready For School, and 100 Things To Do With Your Kids In Olympia.



Mrs. Burfit didn't know what to do. She had opened the front door to see if the mail had come, and here was a man asleep on her front steps. He seemed happy enough, snoring away, but of course that was not the proper place for him and she turned and went into the house to call her husband on the new telephone. Olympia was smaller then and Mr. Burfit appeared in a few minutes; his office was only two blocks away. Mr. Burfit shook the man awake and he stumbled away.

"He's one of the town drunks," said Mr. Burfit unconcernedly, and explained to his bride that, drunk or sober, the sleeper and his brother ran one of the best stores in town.

Life and tide in the West were hard for Mrs. Burfit to understand, anyhow. She had travelled from her home in the Midwest as a visitor to Olympia, fell immediately in love, and she and Mr. B. were married and in their own little house in no time at all. Their honeymoon was a weekend in a tent on the beach at Priest Point Park, a mile from town. She had been so disappointed when her husband pitched the tent far from the water, clear up under the big trees; she had wanted to lie and listen to the romantic waves. But in the morning, here was the tide,

lapping at the tent! Midwesterners find tides hard to visualize. But she became a part of the little town of Olympia, and years hurtled by and with her family growing up around her, Olympia came to be her Home Town.

We would all like to feel that way about the place in which we live. But how does it come about? How is it that the streets and buildings and bushes suddenly become HOME to us? How is it that one feels at home in only that one place? How does the strangeness wear away and turn into a kind of pride, and we know which streets are not cut through and where to turn to get anywhere and who has bought the old place on the corner and how the folks are getting along who have the new store and where the potholes are?

It is easier to become familiar with a town when the geography is striking and certainly this is so in Olympia. A point of land from the south edging Puget Sound east and west; a lake meeting the salt water with a dam between,

crossed by a street and a bridge with spawning salmon swimming under it; a towering dome dominating the hill above, surrounded by government buildings; and strange foreign cargo ships apparently in the middle of town. A range of black hills close, a range of snowy mountains afar, and above all, a huge icy peak that is Mt. Rainier. A neat cup of hills around the town, so that strong winds blow elsewhere, and the fireworks every July on a Sunday evening make five echoes with their loud bangs. This is Olympia.

At first, if there was ever a first, Fourth Avenue was on the shore. Stores and hotels faced the street, but across it skiffs pulled up on the beach until pilings and docks with buildings extended across the tideflats.

When there was an Indian scare, about 1856, a long wall was built across the peninsula (from Chestnut to Water Streets, one would guess) so at least the pioneers would be protected from the back. They were lucky enough to have several

fresh-water springs on their side of the wall. That wall was never needed, and the wood was made into streets. Planks, at first, then later wood was cut into blocks and laid like pavement. It served well, and some of it still hides under the asphalt. Washington Street from Fourth to Legion Way still covers some of the sturdy blocks. That pavement must have been interesting. The wood, probably because it had been a living material, never stayed the same. In summer, the blocks dried and rattled and came loose under the horses' hooves; in winter they soaked and swelled and bulged and made hills and valleys all the way up the streets.

The springs, so well-used in those years, were later contained and piped away in wooden logs bored with holes -- still in use, they say, under some of our streets. Several springs were used as drinking fountains, but were unpredictable. If one turned on the faucet at high tide, pressure on the aquifer meant you got your face washed free, and at low tide, in a dry season, the little trickle was no satisfaction at all.

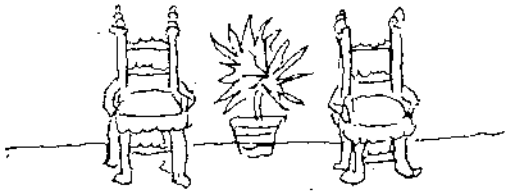
It must have been a pretty sight to see horses and wagons and buggies plodding slowly along the streets of Olympia. We don't see them now, but there are proofs of their use in several

places. One is on Adams Street beside the Cunningham's building where you can still see the iron rings sunk in the sidewalk where the teams were tethered. The horses would stand quietly, shifting their weight with a clink of chain and creak of harness. All thin air now, but they WERE there.

The Methodist Episcopal Church stood on the corner of Fifth and Adams, and across Fifth from it, another church, very close to the street. Both were filled on Sundays with strong-voiced members and loudly expressed witness, and many a Sabbath seemed a competition to keep the horses' ears twitching. How sedate we have become! And how quiet.

Olympia grew, and the church across the street quit the contest first. They built a building somewhere else and sold their two important and ornate pulpit chairs, which resembled thrones, to the Methodists. The silence after the church's moving seemed a little forlorn, for the competition of sound and song had been stimulating, and the Methodists had to try harder to be Christian, which meant strong singing and stronger support of the sermon by a thousand ways to shout "Amen." The two chairs came to be revered as holy historical relics and even now

they sit on the platform of the new Methodist church up the hill, supporting the dignity of the clergy. I wish they could talk. No, sing.



It was right across the street from the old church that the train came in. (Progress: we now have a three-walled lean-to seven miles out of town with no rail connection at all. The only phone is a block-long path through the bushes, around a puddle, to a grocery store.) The railroad station at Fourth and Adams was a wonder. Solid brick; contoured pew seats centered on a pot-bellied stove in the waiting room; large labelled windows through which one addressed the Station Man; and the outside arrival of the immense, steam-heaving locomotive trailed by its baggage car and several passenger cars. When anyone left or came home, it was an important shared event. Everyone, friends or not, came to See Them Off or to Welcome Them Home. It was a real ceremony. The travellers mounted the steps to the cars to calls of farewell, gifts of food for the trip, and

last-minute messages. Tears were shed, and there was much waving of handkerchiefs. Whatever became of handkerchiefs? It does not seem nearly so romantic to wave Kleenex. And when the travellers returned, on the minute when they said they would, there were tears of joy and thanksgiving that they had come home safely and they descended from the high train door to cries of welcome from the waiting crowd. We have lost something.

In the open lot by the train station there was always an old truck. Nobody knew the man who brought it there, but winter and summer, there it sat, and it was filled with firewood and above was propped a hand-lettered sign that said WOOD FOR SALE. We all thought he was crazy. Nobody BOUGHT wood. That would have been embarrassing. A comparison would be that slothful housekeeper who bought bakery bread; a confession of ineffectuality. Buy wood? You got wood from your own back lot and ricked it up under a tree against winter need. Cats were born inside the pile and chipmunks observed the world from its top; raccoons used it for safe harbor; grass grew high around it and mosquitos liked the dampness. WOOD FOR SALE. Humph. I never saw anybody buy it.

With no amusement but that which they made themselves, sociability was a lively part of life and the front porch on anyone's house was the means of communication as well as the General Observer's platform. Sitters on the porches would call out to passers-by, "Howdy, Edgar! How you feeling?" "Miz Horton, how's the foot? What you hear from Beryl?" One could hear, through the usual noises of dogs, mothers calling children at dusk, or couples speaking ill of each other behind open windows. No roaring aeroplanes or snarling logging trucks were yet invented to confuse the social soundtrack of Olympia.

But there were noises. Dogs howled, train whistles blew; every factory in town had its own noon whistle; every boat had its own bellow (and at one time they figured there were more than 90 going up and down the Sound); and the new cars had shrill horns that expressed a growing peevishness at city traffic. So the citizenry rose up and demanded a sound-abating ordinance. The men who worked at the veneer

last-minute messages. Tears were shed, and there was much waving of handkerchiefs. Whatever became of handkerchiefs? It does not seem nearly so romantic to wave Kleenex. And when the travellers returned, on the minute when they said they would, there were tears of joy and thanksgiving that they had come home safely and they descended from the high train door to cries of welcome from the waiting crowd. We have lost something.

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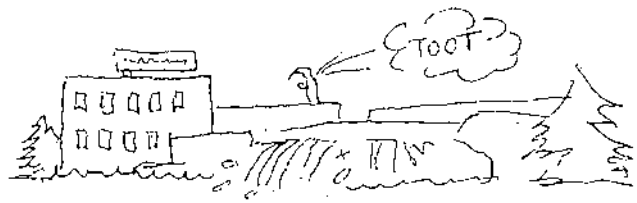
plant next to the water and with floating logs carried by the tide were upset by the ordered quiet. Traffic lights lost their attendant bells and one had to learn to watch as well as listen; dogs became indoor pets and their barking became fainter; the boat traffic waned and no more whistles were heard; the Boston Harbor Light temporarily turned into a Light Only beacon; and, for other reasons, the train came no more into town. It was Quiet.

It is still so. The only exception is the necessary squall of the fire truck crossing town and the monthly testing scream of the old air-raid sirens. No horns. No audible disagreements of dog or citizen, apparently. And Olympia is Quiet. Have we lost our city voice? Or do we all vent by sending a letter to the Editor? Do we speak up on anything?

There is one voice left that somehow did not get ordinanced away. As much as I dislike the industry, not being one to partake of the fruit of the hop, I do enjoy the relic of our past at eight of a morning, rain or shine, and at noon and five, of the brewery whistle. Its deep short blast says, "All right, folks, whatever you've got to do, now's the time to do it. Now. It is Time." Thanks. We need that.



Some of Olympia's history will always fray away with the years and the history of the railroad is in that area. Here was Olympia, the first city on Puget Sound, a growing salt-water port with timber and other industries begging for transportation, thronging with settlers day and night. We needed a railroad -- and still do!

(Pretend it is 1850.) Back East, the Government was being pestered with interests begging for railroad attention in the far West and the President finally appointed a man to sort out the problem by planning rights-of-way across the country -- a grandiose, superhuman project that apparently overcame the man's health and he died. All along the proposed routes, drooling entrepreneurs bought huge parcels of land, hoping that some day the railroad would surprise them by going straight through their property and they would all be millionaires. Nobody knew, and everybody asked, and through some dim process the route became clearer. But what about the western terminus? Would it be

Seattle, with a deep-water port? Tacoma, with some rails already established? Astoria, with its rich sugar-daddies, the Astors? San Francisco?

Or Olympia? And why not, thought the business men. Olympia -- on the main south-north trade route, deepwater connections right in town -- and wouldn't it be grand for tourists to come straight to the capital of the territory? Pioneer settlers wrote frantically to their families in the East. "Send money! We're buying up all the shoreline around the town where the railroad MUST come, and you and we will all be millionaires!"

It didn't come. The end of the track wandered through the woods to Tacoma and many financial hearts were broken. Some said the man appointed to lay out the route died under suspicious circumstances, and many settlers received correspondence from the East full of recriminations: "Why are you asking for permission to sell the land you said would make us rich? Why are you selling the waterfront timberland for five dollars an acre?" The letters said more on this subject, but the words are obscured by their (or my) tears.

So there was, from the beginning, no railroad into town. It did pass through seven miles away and for years you could hear the whistle sounding particularly lonesome as the train roared slowly through the forests away out on the prairie. A railroad spur was built into Olympia years later and people and cargo came and went in accordance with the main line schedule; but the heart was gone out of it and finally that line, too, went out of existence for lack of interest and passengers. A single bus shamefacedly went and came and finally quit and Olympia, the state capital, still has no rail connection.

Early on, when it began to be plain that our city would have no direct rail line, a group of private businessmen, in their exasperation, decided to build their own. Armed only with muscles and determination, they personally built a narrow-gauge line from the west side of the bay in Olympia to Tenino where the main line was. (Interesting that Tenino was named after a locomotive that served the area, an old steam engine with the number 1090.) It came to be a community endeavor, and the ladies used to come out to the current end of the track with sandwiches and barley-water for the perspiring men. Somehow it did not catch on until it was

discovered that on top of the hill near Tenino little black rocks were lying about among the wild strawberries; they were not rocks at all, but a fairly good grade of coal. So that little spur of railroad did serve a purpose to those who lived in Olympia, which solves the mystery why some of the first settlers' fireplaces were much too small for burning wood. One sent one's hired man across the bay to the end of the narrow-gauge railroad turntable (still showing in Oldport on Olympia's west side) for a load of coal. Burning coal was an acquired skill for a Westerner, who innocently thought one could start a fire with simple coal pieces. Easterners had to show them the process: a good roaring wood fire, then coal laid on for long, slow heat.

Are you going to insist on History? I have a friend who, before crossing a bridge, will stop and meditate on whoever was the first person not only to turn the first shovelful of dirt in making it, but who first devised the concept and put the first designing pen to paper. This is not possible in Olympia, for I do not think there WAS a First. In the memory of man, I do not think it possible that there was not a time when

some moving human did not investigate our area, be it Indian or Eskimo or one of the First People; who did not come down the hill to the water's edge; who did not dig in the mud for oysters or clams; who did not consider the kindly terrain and look about for branches to form a shelter or, later, logs or, later, cut lumber for a decent shelter for acceptable living in an agreeable place.

As a natural avenue for travel by trail or boat, there must have been trappers or gold-seekers or hunters or sailors. Travel anywhere in this part of the country meant that they must have crossed the tideflats where Indians had always stopped to dry the fish or climbed the bluff into the dark forest where meat was for the taking, where open fields invited planting, where surrounding shrubs were loaded with fruit or berries.

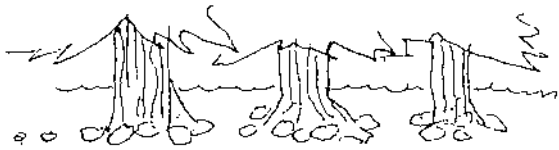
Where the pioneer goes, the missionaries follow, and quickly. A small band of Catholic priests came very early, became acquainted with the local Indians, and established a mission on a nearby point. Yes, we now call it Priest Point Park. The idea then of missionaries was to pity and love the heathen, and then to teach them civilized ways; and so they did, with a school

and even a little marching band complete with red uniforms and caps. There is more to life than this, of course, but for a long time the mission was successful in the fast-growing area.

Other missionaries appeared and one late fall a Presbyterian minister came. His party had been delayed and winter was setting in -- winters were cold, then, and there was no place for them to stay. The minister talked to the priests at the mission and they were allowed to live the winter in a small cabin in the woods above the mission. They also stayed there the next summer and, as everyone did, they planted a garden. They were surprised at the fertility of the soil, for they harvested great returns from their plantings; to the point that they had no more empty cover for potato storage and had to invent ways to keep them. They found that the great trees in the area had roots that spread a bit above the ground, and tucked away their surplus potatoes under them.

Time went on. The mission faded and the minister and his family moved away. They say that for years one could tell fairly closely the whereabouts of the minister's cabin, for near where it must have been, there were potato plants growing out of the roots of the big trees.

There must be some sort of a lesson here. Is it that you and I may go on elsewhere, but meek Mother Nature goes on forever?



Still speaking of history: If we could just see Olympia (or Smithfield, its first name) the way it was originally, we would have a better chance to see how it has changed. If you know where to look, it is still there to imagine how it was.

The center of Smithfield was the Percival Dock. Thanks to those who value our history, it is again. It looks much like it was, according to early pictures. Lacking, of course, are the many boats and ships that went from one town to another. Freight and people could travel cheaper and, yes, faster, that way. The alternative was unpredictable horse and wagon, and even more unpredictable muddy trail.

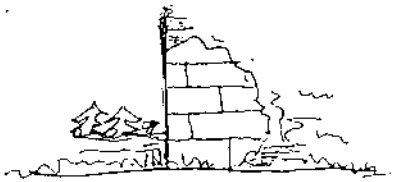
So the center of town was the dock, and hotels and stores flourished near it. On the dock was an old cannon from some sailing ship, and the agreement was that if there was Danger,

meaning Indians, somebody would fire it.. The only time it was fired was when two missionaries came by foot over the hill, saw the cabins and huts, and determined to Hold Services there. They consulted the owner of the largest cabin they could see -- a saloon, whose owner was somehow persuaded to move the bottles and cluster the chairs. The only drawback was the lack of a church bell to call the settlers to worship. The two missionaries took it upon themselves to utilize the cannon, and when they fired it, the populace came running. A follow-up on this bit of history would be interesting, but there isn't any report on the worship service itself and the attitude of that day's crop of worshippers.

When the foundations for the new Olympia Center were dug at State and Columbia, which must have been near the original water's edge, the workers found all kinds of artifacts that dated from the first settlement. Across the street to the east, there is a plaque set in the sidewalk marking the site of the first territorial legislature. To tell the truth, it was held in the room upstairs above the Gold Bar Saloon.

Near the intersection of State and Capitol Way, next to the Mission-style old Olympian building,

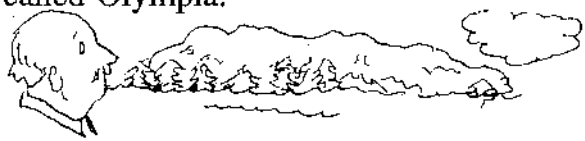
there is an almost unnoticed two-story edifice that flourished in history as not only the first bank in Olympia, but the first brick building. It was made from local bricks, which didn't wear too well, and finally the building had to be reinforced with steel bands and stuccoed over to hide them. But at the corner of the building, where cars turn into the alley, their occasional whack as they turn very neatly exposes the original brick as proof. There you are. History. But you have to know where to look.



And how Smithfield came to have the glowing descriptive name of Olympia? This way:

Up on the hill, where the Capitol grounds now grandly serve us, there were originally, small farms and forest and little roads. There were two settlers who had acreage around town, one named Levi Smith, the other, Edmund Sylvester. Being single and for mutual protection, they had between them an agreement that if anything happened to one, the other would receive his property. Smith had been appointed to some

position in the territory. (Historians will have this more exactly, but the important part of this was the incident that followed.) Smith took to canoe to come around the point to town one day and had an epileptic fit, fell out of the canoe, and drowned. Sylvester took over ownership of the unfortunate Smith's property, built a 16 by 24 foot cabin with a loft on it, and proclaimed to all that he was founding a city to be called, forever, Smithfield. And so it was until much later when some romantic gazed too long at the mountains to the west and announced that this must be a home for the gods, which of course, was called Olympia.



There are always stories of early settlements that, some insist, must be reckoned with in the cold judgment of True or False. What matter? If the story is true, it does add to our hometown history. If not, it is still colorful, descriptive and twice as exciting by being romantically unprovable.

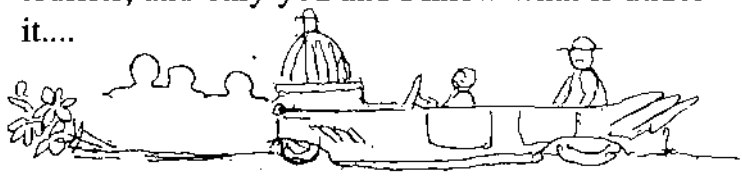
One of these is the planning and building of the new Capitol building. It was designed and planned and the basement was dug and the local Tenino sandstone from which so many buildings

in Olympia were made was cut and trucked and laid out in rows and much of the basement was in place. But the Great Depression of the 1890's came upon them and the glorious center of our state government lay lonely in the rain with no one to work on it. Then it began to revive in men's minds that they should have, as planned in the first place, built the building suitable for the City of the Gods in luscious white marble. What an idea! It was mulled over and agreed upon -- when they got the money, of course -- but what should they do about the existing, grimy-grey, unwanted supplies of sandstone that sat there untended and now unwanted?

At this point, one begins to whisper. On good authority, based on sound gossip and possible corroboration, with most of the exact information overheard on a Greyhound Bus between Seattle and Olympia, that as the depression began to wane, every night after dark a group of the able-bodied and daring young men of the city came together and for weeks quietly shouldered the heavy blocks of sandstone out of the site and carried them to a nearby ravine, tumbling them down into the rubble until the excavation was clean. Then when the

financial climate became healthy again, it could be announced with a clear conscience, though with some sore shoulder muscles, that the noblest and grandest of all the legislative buildings in the United States, second to none but the National Capitol, would be constructed completely of pure white marble. And so it was.

And the ravine was quietly back-filled and filled with good soil and roses were planted, cultivated and laid in rows and properly blooming for the tourists, and only you and I know what is under it....



Once, when the Capitol building was new, the President came to town. There was no television coverage -- no television! Newspapers hawked his trip, radio didn't seem to notice, and his visit caused no excitement at all in state circles, for Republicans dominated the dome on the hill and the President was of the more rebellious party. But the word was passed, and the state house workers had orders to leave their desks at two o'clock and form two lines up and down the marble steps of the Capitol building; and so they did, while the

party arrived and stepped up the huge flight of marble steps as smartly as the effort would allow, up and into the rotunda. It was an impressive sight, though it was unfortunate that nobody had told the onlookers to cheer or clap, and the silence somehow seemed unnerving.

After a while, the cortege emerged and went down into the open cars and formed a little parade into the downtown area. They drove slowly down Capitol Way to the Park where the mayor, armed with a bouquet and a nervous throat waited to welcome the President. The streets were lightly lined with onlookers who pressed close to hear the mayor's speech and were rewarded with one of the most unbelievable malapropisms in history. Some claimed later that they never heard it, but those were of selective hearing, in that they heard what they thought should be heard; and it WAS close.

"Your Honor," gasped the mayor, shoving the flowers, "we are glad to see you here in our fair city." Somebody took the bouquet and he continued, meaning to say, "We hope you'll come again and we know you'll be welcome." But a knot of the closest onlookers had dropped-jaw trouble, for what he honestly

intended to say got twisted in his anxious throat and what actually came out was, "Mr. President, we know you'll come again and we hope you'll be welcome."

For years, in small groups of townspeople, discussions went on as to the mayor's intentions and his delivery, but the wording was documented, though for some reason never noted. A kind of gulp of history, I suppose, and it was kinder to allow the mayor, who was convinced as he continued his plumbing jobs -- being mayor was distinctly a part-time job at that time -- that he had acquitted himself handsomely in the great drama of the world. I guess he had. The President never came back.

Olympia was a town of fear during World War II. Wartime is never a time of sociability anyhow, and no one knew what to expect. There were rumors of firebombs drifting on the wind from Japan, which seemed farfetched, but later proved true. The two lovely, delicate, local Japanese girls we knew had to leave their apartment and go to a camp in Seattle; an air raid warden was picked for each block in the city, with great Authority over house lights at night. (We hung blankets over the windows, being told by the warden that the slightest

pin-point of light would mark Olympia for immediate extinction by bombs.) One was warned publicly and privately never to discuss relatives in the service, no matter where they were. Signs proclaimed that THEY ARE LISTENING, and sociability soured all over the nation.

War, of course, by its very nature discourages friendliness, and we all suffered. This was demonstrated when a family living very close to a crucial bridge in town went back East to visit relatives and in a horrible bit of forgetfulness, left their front porch light on. It was forcibly and completely removed by the air raid warden, and it didn't help any when it came out that the family who had left the light on had a German name. ("There, see! I told you so!") But it all blew over, literally. Two or three firebombs were later found on the Oregon coast where the jet stream failed the balloons.

The air-raid warden had an aged helmet and a stirrup-pump in case of fires. A stirrup-pump was a five gallon can of water with an archaic hand pump in the top. It had an output that could easily be surpassed by one's own natural means. I never heard of one being used in the war. Afterward they failed to collect them and

for years children played war with the helmets on and the stirrup-pumps were used for mixing and applying weed spray.

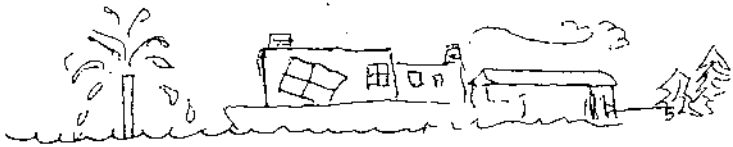
And life went on after the war. Most soldiers came back and children grew up and forgot completely the times when lines were long at the store, cars were driven carefully to stretch gas coupons, and nothing of metal or foil could be had anywhere; butter was non-existent -- it all went to Our Fighting Men; we bought sickly white bags of oleomargarine with somewhere inside it a capsule of dark orange dye that had to be broken and contorted until the glop turned a peculiar yellow. Storekeepers hooted in laughter when one forgot and asked for bacon or bananas. How good these "rarities" tasted after the war!

I suppose that at one time or another every person in Olympia has stopped on the jogging path across the lake, turned around, and admired the skyline of the city against the mountain. As you admired, you noticed a slight movement in -- no, on, the lake, and of all things found you were looking at a jet of water that rose from the lake and then fell back into it. A fountain in a lake? But it is one of the springs that bless Olympia here and there, and this particular one

is the only souvenir left of what once was a lively part of the city's heritage: Hooverville.

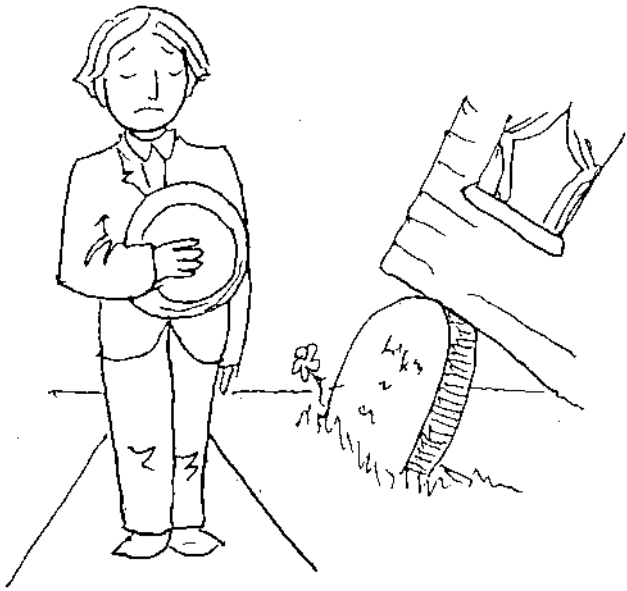
It was during the Great Depression of the thirties that shantytowns appeared in pockets of poverty all over the country. Nowadays there are all kinds of recourse: financial aid from here and there, assistance of many kinds. But at that time, one made do, and tar-paper shacks could make a passable shelter for anyone who could put one together. Found articles, such as a pot or a pan, could outfit a kitchen; newspapers are better blankets than none at night; and in a thousand other ways, those who had to survive on their own resources did so. On the tide-flats below the Capitol was a congregation of make-do dwellings that were at least colorful. Some were float houses. Some were nailed-together pieces of boxes or cartons or driftwood. Some were on rafts and others raised from the muddy beach. But they were shelters and people lived there in a crazy welter of walkways and lean-tos. Most were transient: between jobs, seeking jobs, trying to live without jobs. It was convenient to the city. When a person suspected of crime disappeared, the police knew where to look. When out-of-work loggers roared into town, they knew where to go for shelter. Those cabins with

curtains sheltered other industry. All in all, it served the time and one blessing served them all: the clear, sweet water of the spring in the center of their Hooverville. And that is the spring that still spouts quietly from the pipe in Capitol Lake, where once it spouted from the tide flats. Hooverville is gone, but the spring remains. Honor to it.



One keeps returning to the subject of water, through all the history of our town. Recently it came up again when the old Liberty Theater was scraped out and cleaned to make the Washington Center for the Performing Arts (a title that requires large stationery). Sixteen springs emerged from the deep basement excavation. Each had to be located, incarcerated in cement, forever preventing the building from floating at high tide.

It has been a burden to all the merchants in the downtown area always to contend with the Spirit of All-Pervasive Water. The old Montgomery Ward building, now a restaurant, copied the

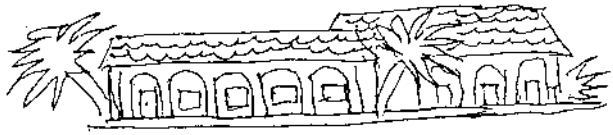


architecture of Japan and built a completely sealed block so that tide or earthquake might tilt but never break the building. The building next to it with the new night club was not quite so successful. In the excavation for its amphitheater, they did successfully dig down to fairly stable beach sand, but ran into some fragrance of distressful nature and wondered what it was until they noticed how close they were to the funeral parlor: formaldehyde.

Olympia can still surprise investigators. It was recently discovered that one corner of the Cunningham's store (a back corner that somehow came to daylight with a builder's appraisal) was resting on a gravestone. One WITH PRINTING. It is not generally believed, however, that someone is resting there. It is more likely that someone at the monument company made a spelling mistake but the propping ability of the stone was still good. That particular building is the last wooden store building in the downtown area -- most of the rest from that period have a startling resemblance to the architecture of San Diego, and for good reason.

In the fastest growing period of Olympia, which was along in the prosperous Nineteen Twenties,

a talented and efficient architect moved his place of business to Olympia from his former home in California. Joseph Wohleb designed good banks, useful schools, and fine stores -- and every one of them was inspired by his former dwelling place in the southern state. Now time has passed and the buildings designed by him are old enough and in good enough shape to be preserved as a part of our city history. Californians are very comfortable with that, but wonder a little.

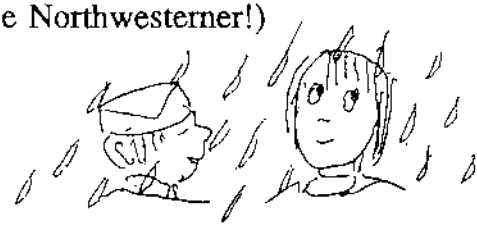


It is odd that Olympia does not have a "heart." It used to, years ago, and everyone knew which intersection it was. The biggest crowd appeared there at noontime from various business establishments on their way to Ben Moore's for lunch and a little snooker. (The wives who ate lunch at home called that place The Hell Hole, because of the snooker and the pool tables.) At that intersection, you could meet a larger percentage of your friends than any other; newspapers were for sale there, and there every dog hung around looking for his master.

Not so any more. The malls are easier to park near, speciality shops are available by a few minutes in the car, and the retailers in the malls encourage a Village Pump atmosphere. Now the downtown is the Paper City. Offices have fewer constituents who phone or rarely show up in person, and the common sight on the street is the little fragile lady who, with her as-fragile friends, lives in the low-cost housing units and teeters along the sidewalk on her way to buy half a dozen eggs at the distant grocery. There are a few of the younger people who seem to enjoy the cold breezes and weak sunshine of the outdoor coffee shops, and even a few who astound us all by wanting to sit right down on the sidewalk, lean against a building and meditate.

The city does come to life at night. It is not the same people who frequent it by day -- in the pitiful way we live nowadays, we fear to walk after dark, probably in fear of skateboards or loud music from cars. It was not always so -- in the more innocent days -- and nights -- long ago, one could, and many did, walk downtown to meet one's spouse or friends for a quick dinner and a choice of movie. It all felt safe and innocent and social.

(Personal remark: Only one time did I ever feel not at ease. It was dusk and I walked across a street and met a young soldier in the middle. He addressed me, "Hi, baby, does it always rain like this?" I asked innocently, "Oh, is it raining?" He really took off. I suppose it is upsetting to meet someone who does not notice the rain. But then again, that is the definition of a native Northwesterner!)



The story of our home town is full of characters and they belong in a recounting of history, for history is not dates and achievements, it is the passage of people, some of whom are of thorny personality and some of lovely and smooth deportment. One remarkable person must not go unnoticed.

There was a scrublady in Olympia. Times have declined and the hierarchy of society no longer involves such people, but at one time the professional scrublady was a barometer of the social area. Not only was one's house known to be completely and antiseptically immaculate -- depending, of course, how many hours she put

in. They were counted without fail by those on her List -- and that was a Master List, which she kept, and on her own terms administered, and many a woman lived and died by the aspiration of getting and staying on her books.

Such a personage was one whom we will call Mrs. Boggs. In the no-nonsense deportment of the day, one called her by her married name, and she called her employer by her first. She ran her own one-woman business, her own industrial corporation, and it was a high honor to be one of her Known Constituents. You HAD Miz Boggs, and your social reputation was made, and you brought it up in every conversation.

One woman, new to town, desperately wanted Miz Boggs, and committed a real social sin in asking her. Miz Boggs turned her down flat, and when asked why, calmly stated that the woman could not afford her. But she had the money -- why was she refused? It was clearly reported that Miz Boggs told her she had to have MEAT FOR LUNCH. Downfall. I heard the woman moved away in disgrace.

Miz Boggs certainly didn't look the part. She was shaped like a clothespin and wore tight

jeans and cowboy boots, but was muscled like a whip. She later went to work in the downtown ten-cent store, but had no patience with the children who for centuries have considered such a store their turf, with small articles, small prices suitable for small people. She became crosser with the years and finally had to be dismissed. Her empire was gone, anyway, and she eventually moved to Arizona someplace to be near her son.

It must not be easy to set up and administer a retail store in any downtown area of any city, even Olympia. There is a delicate set of rules that a vendor could easily overlook in his or her desperate attempt to Make a Living. It must be recognized by them that, through the ages, adults, when faced with the necessity of purchasing some certain object, are subject to a great change when facing the facade of a retail establishment. No matter how secure and serene the prospective customers may be in private or public life, suddenly they lose their equilibrium.

They shift from maturity to fearful child, they stumble over the slightest obstruction. They appear in the door, look at no one, spy the object needed, pay for it as fast as possible, chatting with no person at all, and immediately leave. If, when they arrive home, they find the wrong size or choice, someone else in the family appears to make it right.

This is, of course, not sensible behavior, and merchandisers should recognize this and understand that selling is more than laying articles to be sold in neat rows and then sitting back stolidly waiting for someone to come in and buy them: a simple, uncomplicated process that hopefully will keep their children in braces and sometimes fur coats on their spouse's Sunday shoulders. They have no inkling that the potential customer, reverting somehow to primeval scents of danger, straightens his or her clothing, breathes deeply, perspiring a little, faces the heavy wooden door of the store in apprehension; pulls it open, confronting the sales person who by now is directly facing the customer (defined as a threatening posture). This presents a panic-attack situation to the customer. It is worsened if there are two clerks facing each other and conversing without interruption. This is interpreted by the customer

as a failed attempt to be recognized by society, and can result in his turning on his heel in exit, deciding that he didn't need the article in the first place. This makes for a disappointed and wondering vendor.

Of course, this is not logical, but humans rarely are. But the need must be addressed, so through me, I have this customers' pitiful appeal to those Who Run The Store:

RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR STOREKEEPERS WHO WANT TO STAY IN BUSINESS

Rule 1: If you want customers, see to it that you have windows for buyers to peer into, with obstructions that prevent salespersons from peering out. A meeting glance between the two provokes terror and fast retreat of the customer.

Rule 2: Doors should be at least 90 percent glass, should never squeak, and the nearest salesperson should retreat at least ten feet when someone comes in.

Rule 3: This applies to banks and financial institutions only: Outside doors should be heavy, solid oak, with handles that are hard to

turn. There is a proven notion that robbers do not like this kind of door and will avoid them. Windows of a bank should be small and high, thus broadcasting safety. The outside walls should be of heavy brick, not white, not buttresses, no overhang.

Rule 4: Inside a mercantile establishment clerks should not be allowed to HOVER. Many sales are lost this way. HOVERING appears to intrude upon the customer's decision-making processes and undermines the slight confidence the customer brings with him.

Rule 5: Clerks should not be allowed to speak above a whisper. Many a store has failed miserably because a salesperson was born with Klaxon vocal cords. Delicate discussion concerning price should never be bellowed; in three minutes, the customer is out the door and wondering about shopping in Bellingham.

Rule 6: Never allow a clerk, or any member of the staff, to utter the words, "Have a nice day."

Rule 7: Or "Bye now."

Rule 8: Stores should, by law, be equipped with a little buzzer by the cash register. Not a bell,

which advertises one's inability to obtain help, but a discreet buzzer that only rings in the back room where the clerk is counting collars or having coffee. Either way, the buzzer materializes the clerk in a discreet, no-fault way.

Rule 9: Never, unless necessary for credit card purchases, permit a clerk to recognize a customer who didn't come there to socialize. The customer came to consider the loss of currency against owning a questionable article. This solid judgment deserves serious, unbiased decision that should not be affected by social relationships.

These are simple, primary rules of salesmanship that can make or break a business. One documented example was a local bank that was forced into bankruptcy and everyone knew why. Their facade was unpainted, rough lumber; the marquee was light canvas; and the large, uncurtained windows displayed their financial transactions to the public's uncaring eye. As the capper, the plants on either side of the door were ANNUALS.

No wonder the bank failed. Had they even one employee who was a balding gentleman of fifty, whose collar was too high, they might have made it. It was a pity.

As it turned out, a fast-food establishment bought the building and flourished there for years. The only change they made was really an addition: a neon sign on the roof that simply said EAT, and it rotated.

Real estate, as we think of it today, usually means that a person is either buying or building a house. Its location today will be decided by price, closeness to schools, and availability of sewer connections (water and electricity are never mentioned in town because they are assumed to be there). Insulation is a prime concern, and a good view of something far away is important. All of these concerns would be gibberish to those who first settled in our home town.

The settlers thought first of the soil. Did it drain well? Was it rich enough for the necessary garden? Too much shade from the tall trees? Was there a spring handy? Was the house to be a respectful distance from the salt water? How close was the wood supply?

The house would naturally be of very local lumber; single-wall construction, the long side facing the south to catch all the sunshine it could; doors, front, back and dining room porches, were by design to encourage summer ventilation. Sometimes a separate little building was created beside the house with a roof, a pump, and a stove, open all around with walls only three feet high. This was the summer kitchen, and cooking on a wood stove out there kept the house cool.

No house then was intended to be air-tight. Drafts were a natural act of nature and considered necessary for fresh air. Lighting was of no concern, nor bathrooms or large closets. But the lumber was clear-grained and straight, with honest measurements and sound construction, which makes it easy to understand that the homes could survive, with care, at least a hundred years of weather.

As Olympia grew in population, homes appeared farther from the center of town and acreage

became higher in price, so smaller plots were used. Houses began to appear on the edge of a hill, in a ravine, too near a creek. Here and there, a queer formation of land began to be noticeable. Nobody had a name for the oddities, but except for size, they were alike. A Hole. A hole of from fifty feet across to several hundred feet; amazingly deep, whether in open or forest land, but with no change in surrounding soil or marking; a HOLE deep enough in many cases to hold water, with spring-fed depths of how many feet? Many seemed fairly shallow, but more held deep waters. Children were forbidden to go near and no one knew where the holes had come from or why they were there.

Several, behind Olympia High School (which, you must understand, is in Tumwater), were deep but dry. Homeowners, who built close to the edge, with viewing balconies, have their own trails down into the secret cups, a private amphitheater with picnic tables. Many have private, secret lakes with little boats tied up to their own little docks. Like the Mima Mounds to the south, the holes are a curiosity to visitors and a natural terrain by natives calmly accepted.

At last one man, wanting to build a house and live on the edge of one of the bigger holes,

engaged a geologist to scientifically advise him as to the soundness of his property. The geologist made a thorough investigation of all the holes he could find and happily reported agelessly firm soil. The reason these old conformations existed, he said, was that millions of years ago, in the Ice Age, the glaciers covered this part of the country. When the world began to slowly warm, ice boulders of great size melted slower than the earth around them. They sank into the soil, causing indentations in the earth. Natural springs found the indentations, and timber and grasses grew.

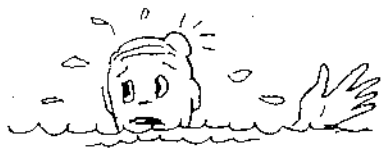
What a strange relationship to the Ice Age! And yet, on Cain Road, North Street, Henderson Boulevard, and anywhere else in the suburbs where the land was cheap because of This Hole, there is our close connection to the beginning of the world. This is wondrous and mysterious, and it keeps us properly humble. How hard it is to realize that we simply can't know everything in the world.

Listen to this: A long time ago, a man drowned in Hewitt Lake, one of the largest of the moraine holes -- large enough to have a ring of houses and small docks ringing the lake. This lake is near the junction of Henderson Boulevard and the Yelm Road, a mile past the cemeteries. After a while, his body surfaced in the Deschutes River above the Falls!

Those same falls have been lived by, and loved, since the first settlers, and we are all grateful for the beautiful park that protects them. On that rocky stretch below the falls, one can still see the remnants of the Crosby Brothers' lumber mill of 1848. Down below, by the second falls into Capitol Lake, there is a large concrete platform that housed Olympia's first powerhouse. It is now a lovely place for picnics on a hot summer day -- the roar and spray is cool. But that beauty speaks of danger, too, and repeats the respect we should feel toward the powers of nature.

A few years ago, in midsummer, some boys were diving from the top of the falls to the churning waters beneath, and one boy did not come up. For an hour or so there was a great commotion, and firemen were sent for and

relatives were called to the scene. They looked for his body along the shores of the lake. There was great fright and sadness. Suddenly the boy appeared, rubbing his head. There are unsuspected caves under the falls, and the boy had bumped his skull in diving and stayed in the cave until he felt better. Now this is a dangerous bit of knowledge, and be sure that from then on, any kind of swimming is forbidden there. Sternly forbidden.



This little book, like civilization, has staggered along through Olympia's history with only my aspect of the truth: mine. Others may describe our home town with entirely different report, and that is fine. They are justified, and so am I. A corporate, gathered collection of reports would not be true, either, for memories come with color and excitement, to one person at a time.

And then, too, I have only described my OWN home town to you; this bay, these hills, this harbor, these people -- all near and dear to me. I don't know if this is true to you. The strangeness has long been worn away and in the description of Olympia, I hope it has worn away for the reader, too, and the familiar has made it dear.

Such a town! Such people -- brave, survivors, smiling, though the light heart may be an achievement; direct, appreciative Northwesterners. In them I feel great pride, and a strong belief that those who live here are worthy of the bright future that must come. I know their faults -- well, some of them -- but love them still. I feel at home here, and by now I hope you do, too. Why not? You now know which streets are not cut through, and where you turn to get anywhere, and how the new folks are getting along. Life here may not be smooth, but where is it smoother?

How can the future in our home town be anything but bright? We know where the potholes are.

the end