

150 Years of Pierce County Stories South Hill Historical Society Does the Puyallup!

by Jerry Bates

For local history buffs this year's fair was the place to be; the Western Washington Puyallup Fair, "Fair Museum" featured an historical look at Pierce County (the County celebrated its 150th birthday last year). For those not familiar with the Fair Museum, it's a separate building not far from the Blue Gate entrance to the Fairgrounds. Every year different shows or themes are featured along with its permanent display of Puyallup Fair history and memorabilia. For 2003 Pierce County History was the subject. This gave the County heritage societies the use of this excellent facility for the full 17 days of the Fair. This was a rare opportunity, for those societies that participated, to get exposure to tens of thousands of fair goers. The theme was "150 Years of Pierce County Stories," organized by the Pierce County Heritage League of which our Society is a member.

Our society was invited to participate by the Heritage League President, Andy Anderson. Being an infant society compared to some of the more established societies in Pierce County our leadership felt we weren't quite ready for such an undertaking. But some of our membership felt otherwise! Olive Parks McDonough volunteered to head up a committee and the rest is history.

Olive had to get commitments from enough members to man the museum on our scheduled day (Wednesday, September 17th). These volunteers were to welcome visitors and answer questions, and hopefully, generate interest and new members to our society. Each volunteer was to spend an hour or two at our display. For their effort they would get a free exhibitors pass to the fair.

Paul Hackett, our president, got on-board with his characteristic enthusiasm and single-handedly

created (on his dining room table) a very impressive display of South Hill history (see photo). Carl Vest stepped forward to laminate copies of our newsletter to be attached to the display. Yours truly made a County map handout locating all the participating societies. We must also thank the others who volunteered their time to man the

exhibit: **Charles Hoenhaus, John Thun, Bonnie Nicolet Starkel, Joan Parks Vosler, Gerald Shea, Dorothy Swalander Norris, Carolyn Nelson, Sheila Rinker, Marilyn Burnett, William Goelzer, Edward Zeiger and Chris O'Kelly.**

This kind of voluntary effort and energy is the very life-blood of any successful organization and we thank the participants very much.



John Thun and Olive Parks McDonough greet Puyallup Fair visitors while representing the South Hill Historical Society.

From the Editor:

Some of you go back many years as residents on the Hill. I'm sure, you have some fond memories or experiences of a South Hill much different from the Hill we live on today. Personally, I've wondered what South Hill was like during the Great Depression? What were the Rabbit Farms all about? Did WWII change things on the Hill? I've heard, people in Puyallup considered people on South Hill hillbillies? Could families subsist on a South Hill farm with no outside employment?

I'm sure there are hundreds of other interesting topics. If you have some special knowledge or interest relevant to South Hill history, please share it with the rest of us by submitting an article to the newsletter.

Needless to say, the more people who contribute to our publication, the richer it will be, beyond what the current few contributors could ever make it. Come on, jot down those stories and submit them to Paul Hackett, 11711 92nd AV E, Puyallup WA 98373.

The Longmire Party and the Crossing of South Hill

by Carl Vest

In the Fall of 1853 a wagon train crossed the Cascade Mountains, traveling East to West, using a trail through an opening in the high country named Naches Pass. It was the first use of this path by wheeled vehicles. This pioneering group is usually called the Longmire Party, named for one of the wagon train leaders – James Longmire.

Over the years the number of people in the crossing party has been the subject of some debate. Several different totals have been proffered, ranging from a low of 140 to highs in the 180s. About 170 is probably close to the correct number. The count will probably never be known, as there is still confusion relating to the counting of families and the number of single men traveling with the group.

On May 10, 1853, the Longmire wagon train, along with other traveling combinations, departed Council Bluffs (now in Iowa). Three months later, on August 15th, they reached the Umatilla River, crossing it on August 17th at a place called “Swift’s Crossing.” At that point they left the traditional Oregon Trail. The party proceeded north to Fort Walla Walla and became the first party of emigrants to cross the Columbia River east of the Dalles.

After crossing the Columbia the pioneers moved westward to the Yakima River. Then going northwesterly they reached the settlement of Wells Springs. After that their course was west, along Cold Creek and the Rattlesnake Hills, up the Selah Valley along Wenas creek, and over the ridge between Clemmen Mountain and Bald Mountain. In total, they crossed the Naches River sixty-eight times. One account declares they reached the Cascade timberline on either September 17th or 18th.

After climbing up the eastern slopes of the Cascades the party reached Summit Prairie (now named Government Meadow). Accounts differ, but they attained the summit about October 1st.

On the Cascade’s western slopes the party first struggled down the Greenwater River, crossing it eighteen times. The pioneers then shifted to the White River valley, crossing it seven times. There was a brief pause on Connell Prairie. During this descent the travelers made their first contact with residents of the Puget Sound area, who had been working on a road up the western side of the

Cascades toward Naches Pass. Finally the group reached the Puyallup River, in the vicinity of Alderton, about one week after leaving the summit. As the group progressed farther west the traveling was a bit easier, because of the local attempts to fashion a road along the Puyallup and White Rivers.

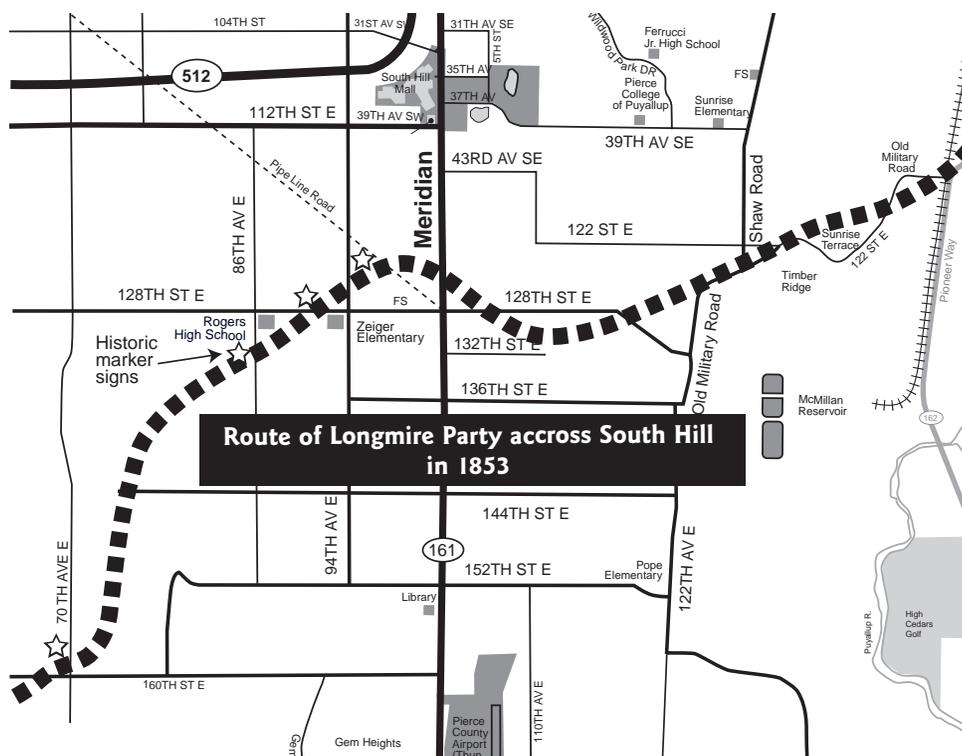
Upon reaching the Puyallup River the settlers found it to be running low and choked with salmon, which they were able to kill with a variety of clubs, axes, and other non-fishing tools. The emigrants were half-starved at that point and writings note that these fish were the best they had ever eaten.

On October 8, 1853, the wagon train left the Puyallup River and climbed onto the Nisqually Plains over what is now known as South Hill. That evening they made camp at Clover Creek, at the farm of Christopher Mahon, about six miles from Fort Steilacoom. That camping location is now the Brookdale Golf Course.

As the pioneers neared the end of their journey they were in poor physical condition. Crossing the continent had used up most of their food stores, and most of the inventory that was left had been lost coming down the rugged west slopes of the mountains. They had found and eaten fish while at the Puyallup River, but otherwise most of the travelers lacked basic comestibles for survival.

The Puget Sound people who had interacted with the wagon train as it progressed down the mountains had reported the poor physical condition of the members of the party. So, as the wagons were crossing South Hill, Dr. William Tolmie, of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, a branch of the Hudson Bay Company, sent the party some meat. Additionally, to supplement the meat donation two local farmers, Lackey and Mahon, contributed vegetables. This generosity permitted the party to enjoy good food during their last encampment together.

Also, when the party was settled in camp, Mrs. Mahon invited the ladies and children to eat in her house. This meal was their first at a table in about six months, an experience which Mrs. James Longmire referred to as a bright spot on memory’s page.



Want to get in on the newest game on South Hill?

by Paul Hackett

Play “Do You Know.....? Get all 10 correct and you are a pioneerophyle on South Hill.

1. Where did a verified Japanese paper balloon bomb land on South Hill in June 1945?
2. How deep is the south end of Bradley Lake?
3. Why was what is now Meridian Avenue chartered in the shape of an “L”?
4. Why did the McMillan Grange come to the Fruitland Grange to administer the 5th and 6th degree work?
5. Why did the contractor sue the City of Tacoma for more money in 1912 to complete the building of the Pipeline?
6. Why did the grocer’s daughter dislike The Tennessee Waltz being played constantly at the Willows Tavern next door?
7. Why did promoters in the 1930’s urge buying land on Main Street (now 122nd St E) on South Hill?
8. Why doesn’t 39th Av SE (formerly 112th St E) hook straight east and west to Meridian Avenue?
9. Was there ever a landing strip for planes on the west side of Meridian?
10. Why did they charge \$.75 for “Gentlemen” at The Willows, a destination resort dance hall, and \$.25 for “Ladies.”?

Challenge your friends and if they don’t know any of these answers either, join the South Hill Historical Society and help us find answers, or wait until the answers appear in the next newsletter.

Getting here in 1853 Part II

October 7th Meeting



Mark your calendar for Tuesday, October 7 for our next meeting. We will meet at 11:15 AM at the Highlands which is located at 502 43rd Ave. SE, east of the YMCA on South Hill.

The October meeting is on the first Tuesday of the month in order to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the crossing of South Hill by the Longmire Party. This group forged their way across the Cascade Mountains over the Naches Pass Trail, actually crossing South Hill on Oct. 8, 1853, on their way to Fort Steilacoom.

Our program will include videotapes of jeep trips following the original trail plus a talk by Margaret Olson and two others from the Buckley Museum. They will describe their trip along the Naches Trail when they reenacted the Longmire-Byles trip in 1953.

In November we will meet on the third Tuesday, Nov. 18, at 11:15AM at the Highlands.

Carolyn Nelson, Secretary

South Hill Historical Society Membership Form

Name		
Address		Phone
City	State	Zip

Home E-mail address:

Signature _____ Date _____

Annual Dues: **Society membership \$25.00**
Note: Please do not send cash.

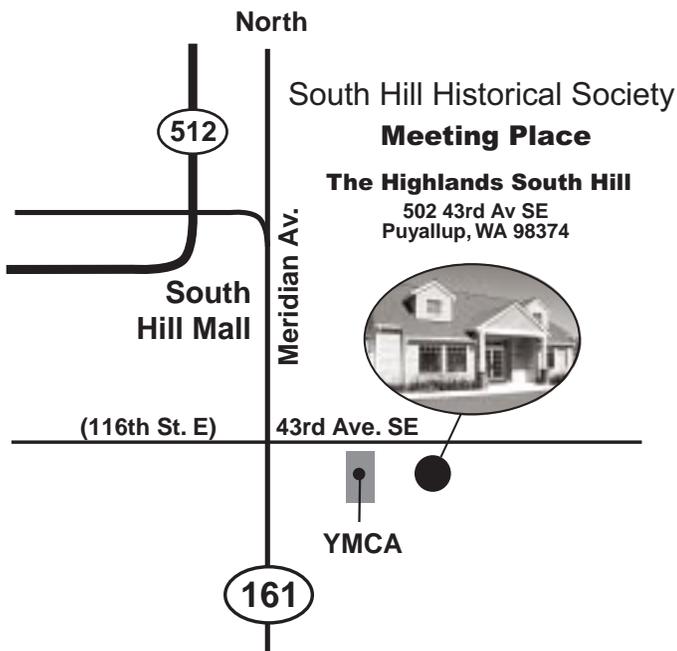
Make check or M.O. payable to **South Hill Historical Society** and mail with this application to:

SHHS Membership, 11711 92nd AV E, Puyallup, WA 98373

Where to find us

The South Hill Historical Society meets regularly on the **THIRD TUESDAY** of the month at 11:15 AM at the Highlands in the Community Center (no meetings July & August). This complex is located at 502 43rd AV SE, adjacent to and east of the YMCA.

We welcome you to our monthly meetings. For more information contact our president, Paul Hackett, at (253) 845-7691.



South Hill Historical Society Officers

President, Paul Hackett
Vice-President, Carl Vest
Secretary, Carolyn Nelson
Treasurer, Ben Peters
Newsletter Editor, Jerry Bates



HERITAGE CORRIDOR
11711 92nd AV E
Puyallup WA 98373

From the Treasurer: Our Current Members

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Jim and Elizabeth Anema
Jerry Bates
Ward F. Bradley
Mildred A. Dobbs
Don and Mary Glaser
William (Bill) Goelzer
Hazel Whitford Miller Goheen
Calvin and Amy Goings
Paul Hackett
Cecil and Doris Herbert
Charles and Maybelle Hoenhous
Art S. and Marvella Massie
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To: