



HERITAGE CORRIDOR

History On The Hill

The Newsletter of the South Hill Historical Society

Volume 8 Issue 3 Summer 2010

Old Schools bring back poignant memories

by Debbie Burtnett

A newspaper clipping fell out of my Hoosier grandmother's letter. It was about my favorite elementary school--Holland School in New Castle. It was scheduled for destruction. As a young mom, aspiring teacher, and a good student, I loved school. Although the neighborhood and alumni tried to save Holland School, it was razed in 1981.

Named for a prominent businessman, Joshua Holland, the 1910 school was not unlike Firgrove School here on South Hill. There was one classroom per grade; cloak rooms, polished wood floors; and stairs down to the basement for the library and rest-rooms. The third floor housed the upper grades of the fourth and fifth grades along with a small office for teachers and a traveling principal. Responsible fifth graders were trained to answer the phone--which rarely rang--and to take messages. This was the school where I learned penmanship; where I returned after a long bout with rheumatic fever; where Mr. Ayers read our class *Old Yeller*; and where I was the Long Di-

vision Champ. It was also my last classroom before my move to Florida.

Many years later, I returned to the site. Covered

in asphalt-- but with the school's original rock wall landscaping around it-- stands a Dollar General store. Nearly destroyed by the failure of the economy and Daimler-Chrysler's defec-tion, the town has only a small population left. All of my old schools are gone, including Castle High School, not unlike Tacoma's Stadium High. Chrysler High School is being renamed, and

the school district is about the only remaining employer.

Old schools evoke not only the memories of friends, teachers, and the experiences that shaped later school years and life but also most poignant memories having to do with smells. Psychologists believe that smells evoke the strongest memories. Freshly baked bread, Thanksgiving feasts in the kitchen; pine scent



SHHS Secretary Debbie Burtnett at the location of her old school. *Diane_Evelyn of Zazzle.com located one of the few photographs of Holland School "...on Broad Street in New Castle, Indiana. By the time I went there, it was very old. Now torn down and replaced with a Dollar General Store. Sigh..."*

from the Christmas tree... and for those who love schools, those scents include paste; tempura paint in starch for finger painting; the shavings of a freshly sharpened wood pencil; smells that answer 'what's for lunch?' even though we didn't like school food... melting snow off rubber galoshes in the cloak room and the crisp scent of Fall's cool breezes as the new school year began—even the paper towels in the restroom had a unique smell.

South Hill has a treasure on the Hill--that gem is the old Firgrove school. The former students and teachers can relate the same kind of memories I have noted here. I sat down with former students and one employee last May, and they

described the many trees around the school (which gave it the name Firgrove); cool water shared with a common gourd for drinking; picnic lunches; going to school for years with the same family and friends and graduating together; starting lives and families together on the Hill; and sending their children to Firgrove. They enjoyed shared experiences which evolved into precious memories. A community-built school became a New Deal project at a time when many schools closed and education suspended across a nation affected by the Great Depression. Firgrove stands as a monument to that awful era when getting an education was difficult, but not impossible on South Hill.

Don Glaser & The History of Firgrove School *by Debbie Burnett*



The old Firgrove School is still with us. Not much remains on South Hill's Meridian Avenue from 75 years ago... The school has a history going back to 1895 and Don Glaser's great-grandfather.

When Don Glaser visits Firgrove Elementary School located near 136th Street on Meridian, he sees it through the eyes of a child who began his education there in 1936, a first grader descended from original South Hill pioneers who made the school possible in a District all of its own. When Don was 6 years old, Firgrove was only one. Now, at age 80, "Don is helping coordinate a second reunion, the Firgrove Elementary School Historical Picnic, a potluck gathering for classes from 1895 to 1975," says classmate Katie

Bennett. Of last year's successful reunion, Don remarked, "Most of the people I hadn't seen in a while. It was really good to meet them [again] and get big hugs from everyone."

In 1895, Patzner Road School was built by Don's great-grandfather, John Patzner, on land purchased from the Northern Pacific Railway on 136th Street for \$25. The wooden structure stood in what is now the housing development of Heritage Glen between 136th and 144th Streets.

The early pioneers on South Hill including the families of the Patzners, Glasers, Predmores, and Kupfers and other community members built the first Firgrove school. Later, when the second and current Firgrove School was built, Fred Predmore, Jr., presented then Principal Ken Keener with the original deed to the Firgrove School property in 1953. The document is on permanent display at the school.

Firgrove School was set on five acres, built of brick veneer with two classrooms 20'x34' as wings to the central portion including a hallway, office, and a 200 seat auditorium with stage. Monies for construction came from FDR's alphabet agency, the Public Works Administration (PWA), with a supplement of \$4,500 voted by the local school District. Government funds were also used to level and lay out the school grounds. The purpose of funding under the Public Works Administration was chiefly the construction of schools--creating jobs on government projects, working along with states--(at a rate of one federal dollar to three state dollars)--to stimulate the economy with consumer buying power. But the work was done by labor pool of the Works Progress Administration. Both programs, created in 1933 and 1935 respectively, were administered by Harry Hopkins.

The Firgrove School was one of the 110,000 libraries, schools, and hospitals built under the New Deal program, Works Progress Administration (WPA). Many workers were unskilled laborers, but managed to build not just schools like Firgrove, but roads and airports. Even clothing was made. The program was controversial in that professionals such as teachers, writers, artists, etc., were employed and received pay for jobs that ranged from raking leaves to documenting the Depression in the South to writing music, books, and producing art. Women and minorities were also aided by the WPA.

The so-called "make work" program's legacy includes Grant Wood's *American Gothic*; murals in schools across the country; and the combined photography and writings of James Agee and Walker Evans documenting Southern farm tenancy. Much like today's historical societies, the professionals working under the federal program collected historical narratives and documented Depression conditions which are priceless today.

In December 2008, the Puyallup School District (Connections, Vol 14:3) made clear that future funding would go for the replacement of several elementary schools including Waller Road, Spinning, and Firgrove. Firgrove's unique status as a New Deal school in the growing area called South Hill--and its location at the heart of South Hill--make it an ideal gathering place for the community in the future, say supporters who want to keep the old school open as a mu-



Original South Hillian Don Glaser and current Firgrove Principal Charmaine Krause, met to exchange pictures of the many classes from both Firgrove school locations. Krause stated, "It would be nice to have a reception for alumni in our library...lay the pictures out, and reminisce. I know and understand the history of Firgrove." The first annual Firgrove reunion was held at Meridian Habitat Park in 2009. Many class photos are missing as well as a photo of the original school building. All future reunions are scheduled for the first Saturday each August at the Meridian Habitat Park (the former Amphitheater) located at 144th and Meridian.

seum, meeting place, and monument that unites all of the neighborhoods that comprise South Hill.

It seems fitting that a structure built for the public's use--Firgrove School and other community buildings that remain with us-- be used as a constant reminder of the nation's shared history and positive effects of a true 'stimulus package.'



Firgrove School was dedicated Sept. 26, 1935. "It was a special place," recalled Don Glaser. "It was like a castle that you went into on the Mountain Highway." That building has "no marks" said Glaser and "survived several strong earthquakes including the Nisqually Quake." The Firgrove school was built "super strong."

Historical Preservation & Our Society *by Debbie Burtnett*

On April 22, 2003, Pierce County Ordinance No. 2003-10s was adopted. Along with a Vision Statement, an organization was charged with recording "South Hill's history of settlement and development through restoration and preservation." That group is the South Hill Historical Society.

By definition, historical preservation or heritage conservation, as it is known in Canada, is a professional endeavor that seeks to preserve, conserve, and protect buildings, objects, landscapes, and other artifacts of historical significance. Examples of historic sites and artifacts include parks; landscapes; battlefields; National Historic Landmarks; memorials; monuments; Districts (*Vieux Carre*—e.g., New Orleans' French Quarter); iconic signs (Las Vegas neon sign); airports (Thun Field); water treatment plants; houses; hotels; prisons (Alcatraz); and schools—my favorite.

Preservation seems to be all the rage lately across the country and the world. Some of it is conservation in nature such as saving the cliffs at *Pointe du Hoc* at Normandy Beach in France; beach renourishment; or trails such as the Naches/Heritage Trail which crosses South Hill locations. Historic homes, castles, and churches from Medieval times, the inspiration for Disney World's Cinderella Castle or London's Buckingham Palace which needs its roof replaced. On the home front, preservation of historic places began with Mount Vernon—George Washington's home-- in 1858 and continued with the National Park Service under the Department of the Interior. However, many things merit preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation by either federal, state, or local municipalities.

Statewide, "Main Street" programs such as Puyallup's were saved from "the state's chopping block" (TNT 6/28/2010) by moving the state's groups into the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Trust also has a mission statement. Founded in 1949, the non-profit organization was charged with providing "leadership,

education, advocacy, and resources to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize our communities."

How does the South Hill Historical Society play a role in preservation? According to Michael Saunders, Managing Archivist for the Central Northwest and Puget Sound Regional Branches, "...local heritage organizations fulfill a key role in collecting, preserving and providing public access to records, photographs and artifacts generated by businesses, organizations and individuals outside of government. This material and information documents that nature and identity of communities through time and its preservation and accessibility gives succeeding generations of residents an informed understanding of their communities that they can't get from other sources."

Work in the last nine years of the Society includes:

- 150 hrs. of recorded oral histories
- 3,600 news clippings and hundreds of photographs, many with unidentified individuals in them
- Researching and organizing biographies and autobiographies of South Hill pioneers
- Chronological documentation (1,226) of activities since startup in 2000
- Maintaining contact with 623 people with South Hill connections in the database.

Currently 87 individual members of the Society wish to continue their mission, but more members are needed to carry out long-term goals. Quarterly newsletters and a website provide members and the public historical information about South Hill. The Society is credited with identifying local historic roads and providing the signage for each; e.g., Ball-Wood Road (now Meridian); Glaser Road, Patzner Road, and others named for the pioneering families who settled here. Another goal is identifying the oldest homes and structures within the parameters of South Hill—including Firgrove School, second in age to Puyallup's 1886 Central School which burned down in 1922.

This last goal has been taken seriously by Historic Tacoma, the group responsible for preserving Tacoma's architectural legacy with a special

focus on its iconic schools. The major owner of the schools is Tacoma Public Schools. Some are continuing to house students and others are museums that "...teach history lessons" stated the headline in the June 21 edition of the TNT.

State representative candidate Hans Zeiger, a descendant of original South Hill pioneers and educators, repeated what he has learned from at least five other successful historical societies in the area. Newly elected as vice-president of South Hill's historical society, Zeiger states that "...preserving an historical landmark means that it would become the focal point of the Society's physical existence, fundraising, and long-term aspirations. While the Society is and must remain a group of people who celebrate and promote South Hill history, I think that the best historical societies find their energy through landmark preservation." Zeiger cited several local museums --the Meeker Mansion; the Job Carr Cabin; the Lakewood History Museum; the Museum of History and Industry; and the Tacoma Historical Society--as evidence that this belief holds true.

A good ally for historical landmark preservation on the Hill might be the South Hill Community Council.

To quote SHHS Research Coordinator, Carl Vest: "Another organization on the Hill that has some of the same preservation objectives as the Historical Society is the South Hill Community Council (SHCC). SHCC has been in existence longer than any other activist citizens group in this part of Pierce County. It was organized in the early 1970s. Over the years it has partnered with various groups for a range of causes aimed at improving and preserving a way of life on South Hill.

It was SHCC members who helped develop the present South Hill Community Plan that specifically addresses historical preservation. As part of the Plan's section titled "Community Character and Design Element," there is a segment titled "Historic Preservation." That part of the Plan, also known as Objective 35, states that the objective is the "Identification and preservation of South Hill history." For historic preservation

the Community Plan specifies three principles. They are as follows:

1. Identify and record South Hill's history and centralize the information in a public location.
2. Preserve sites of historical significance and strive to emphasize the importance of community history.
3. Promote the knowledge and presence of history in the community because it provides a sense of belonging and tradition for those who live in or visit the community.

Upon completion the Community Plan was accepted by Pierce County as the guiding strategy for South Hill is now part of the County Code. It has been in place for several years and is the basis for all land use and development decisions on the Hill.

Thus, SHCC has been, and continues to be, a significant force in the ever changing development of South Hill.”

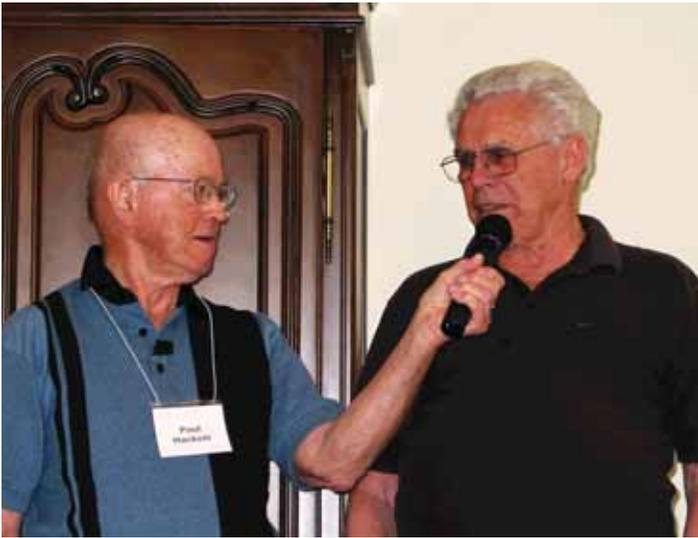
How might we use historic sites on South Hill to increase historical awareness? In August, Thun Field hosted a fund-raising antique car show. Just last year, the Field celebrated the life of founder, John Thun, and its 65th anniversary.

Both Puyallup and South Hill have schools that date back to the Depression-era--schools which are now considered historic because of the remarkable period in which they were built. (See accompanying article). In my travels and moves around the country, as a student and a teacher, I have visited several historic schools and the sites of my former schools. Many are restored to their historic eras and open for tours. Some schools have been used for further learning in school districts such as Puyallup's Karshner School with regularly changing exhibits. Others which could not be saved from the wrecking ball due to economic issues—such as my schools in Indiana—are honored with historic postcards sold in local Hallmark shop and a local motel. Others, such as Central High School in Centerville, IN, are in various stages of refurbishment. Currently, part of that 1935 school is used for counseling services. In the meanwhile, students attend their newer structure, Lincoln High School.

To make South Hill something other than Meridian lined with strip malls requires the dedication of the people who live there and the political will of local officials. Firgrove School provides such an opportunity --to provide an historic setting to teach the history of South Hill to our local school children and provide a place for research about South Hill itself. Located at the heart of South Hill, visualize a community center—a meeting room—where organization could meet; book clubs could convene and enjoy local writers; a restored stage (now a classroom) that could be rented by businesses for awards; for school and small theatre productions; a place where local artists could display their work(s); books and postcards could be sold in a gift shop; and the reunion committee would have a place from which to organize their annual affair. While the school is located near busy Meridian, it is fortunately situated with the front door facing Meridian, and is complete with a parking lot and meets ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards. Two other schools are also slated for replacement—Spinning and Waller Road down in Puyallup. The March 2009 bond program was going to provide for the replacement of all three schools—but it passed and provided for the maintenance of schools needing immediate attention, such as Ballou Jr. High.

According to the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation's list of historic properties across the state threatened by neglect or destruction, Firgrove Elementary's original 1935 structure qualifies for historic status. At a Kiwanis meeting in February 2009, Rudy Fyles, Executive Director of Facilities for the Puyallup School District, indicated that “...there are no plans for razing the old building” and it was his opinion that the building would still be there in five years. However, Fyles stated that it was his opinion that the building “could be transferred to another organization if there was a political will to do so.” After the successful capital levy vote in March of 2009, Firgrove ranked fourth on a schedule of schools needing replacement. At that time, the project was slated to begin in January 2010, but with a still struggling economy and maintenance issues for the district, the project seems to be on hold.

May General Meeting



Paul Hackett interviews Ray Dally, Paul's long time friend, Ray has lived all his life on South Hill.

Ray told us that his family moved to the area in September 1941, before the war began. He described some poignant moments of both personal and national history on South Hill--the loss of his brother in a tragic accident at Canyon Road and 104th Street on December 5, 1941. Then, he recalled the Japanese internment at Camp Harmony at the Puyallup Fairgrounds and described the "shanties" built across from the roller coaster. He remembered the internees leaving in trucks about September 1942, where they boarded trains to spend the remainder of the war in Minidoka, Idaho.

Ray's career began when he built a home on 92nd down by the old firehouse on 2 ½ acres. He broke his property into six lots and created Rainier Terrace. His homes of 1800 sq. ft. featured two-car garages and large lots, selling for \$17,500. He commented that amount bought a nice home in those days.

He became a foreman for Boyle Construction Company in 1963 and built Oakwood Terrace, comprised of 81 building sites, of which he built 70 of the homes over a three-year period.

As a member of the Home Builders Associa-

tion, Ray enrolled in a 26 week course taught by a Seattle man who "taught us how to manage and develop property" after which he bought ten more acres at 104th and Meridian and sited two eight unit apartment buildings there. Today, there are 186 units there. He purchased 24 acres at 128th Street from the Hohenhouses, and established three buildings, ending up with 265 units.

The Dallys also helped develop the YMCA, "a major part of the community...that brought the community together...[with] roughly 22,000 members to date, providing a great place to meet people from infancy to seniors." Ray and Deanna feel that their commitment to the "Y" "is really an honor to participate and give back to our community."

Ray told of many other accomplishments, and memories, from his early paper route, 4-H, Puyallup High School, submarine training in San Francisco, working at Boeing for \$1.50 an hour, John Thun, bicycling in Europe, his work on hospital boards and the importance of faith in his life.

June General Meeting



June is our luncheon meeting and our last meeting before summer break. Along with the goodies, Paul Hackett handed out a South Hill quiz. Members shared memories and the new slate of Society officers were elected (see bottom of page 9).

Firgrove Reunion 2010

Leslie Odom was 21 and fresh out of college when she began teaching in the 1935 Firgrove School in 1974. Miss Odom, later Mrs. Betts, attended her first Firgrove Reunion this year. While she was quite serious about her teaching, students and teacher often had fun with each other.

“Please take your seats,” instructed Miss Odom on a daily basis. And, one day, the students did just that--picking up their desks and marching outside!”

Memories such as these were recounted at the Firgrove Reunion held at Meridian Habitat Park on the first Saturday of August. Traveling the farthest was Snowbird Sandra Dean Crookshank from Yuma, AZ. The eldest student attending was Dorothy Nelson (88 years young!) and her teacher, Miss Hazel Whitford (Miller Goheen) was the oldest Firgrove teacher in attendance.

Mrs. Goheen began teaching at the Patzner

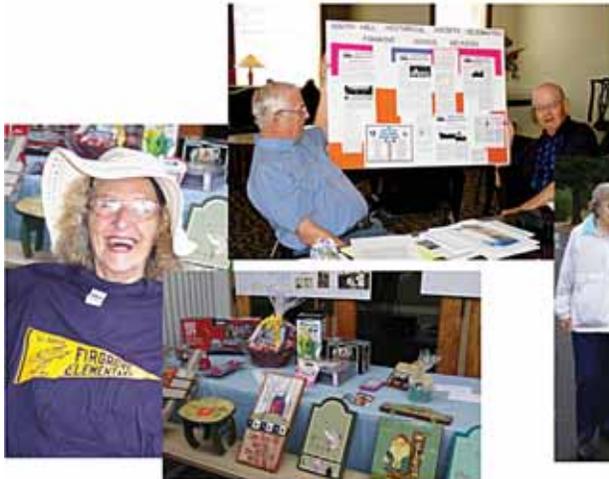
Road location in 1929. Finding herself without adequate texts or resource materials, she took a suitcase up to Seattle when the public library gave away their old books. She picked up a set of encyclopedias, too, noting today “that encyclopedias then didn’t weigh what they do now...” Miss Whitford’s salary of \$100/mo. was a “very good salary” at a time when other teachers earned \$35/mo. Throughout her career in Western Washington elementary schools, Miss Whitford enjoyed her teaching career and “always had a good time.”

Firgrove organizers Katie Bennett Gabrielson, Janet Miracle Eldon, Diane Milne French, and Don Glaser gathered door prizes from members such as handmade jewelry and wall plaques as well as gift certificates from South Hill businesses including Black Angus and Maximum Performance. Other prizes were purchased from various businesses on the Hill.

Firgrove shirts are available from Katie Bennett Gabrielson at a cost of \$15. Just call her at 253-845-1207. Organizers were pleased with the turnout of 65 people.



Reunion committee from the left, Janet Miracle Eldon, Don Glaser, Katie Bennett Gabrielson, Diane Milne French



From the Treasurer

by Ben Peters

Please call, e-mail or write any change of address to me, Ben Peters, 253-845-7028, *pop-paben2002@yahoo.com*, 14602, 106th Avenue Court E., South Hill, WA 98374.

Also, don't forget that we are a 501(C) (3) non-profit organization. Dues, donations, etc. are fully deductible from your income taxes, if you are able to do so—the Society thanks Paul Hackett for his recent generous donation.

Updated Roster Available

A printed roster including members' home and e-mail addresses, plus phone numbers is available upon request (*restricted to members only*). Call me—Ben Peters—at 253-845-7028.

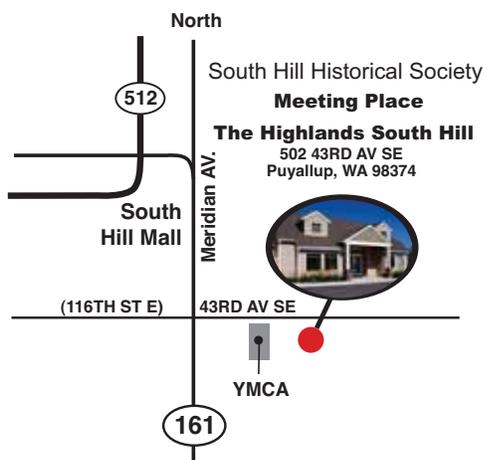
Dues Reminder

I will attach a sticky note to the Society newsletter mailed closest to your renewal date.

Where to Find Us

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

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



Our Current Members

Andy G. Anderson	Marvella Massie
John & Ruth Anderson	Olive McDonough
Jim & Elizabeth Anema	Laurienne Stewart Minnich
Bob Ballou	Ronald Moe
Jerry Bates	Carolyn Nelson
Susan Beals	Dorothy Nelson
Katherine Bennett	Juanita Nordin
Marilyn Burnett	Mark & Dorothy Norris
Debbie Burtnett	Christopher & Gloria O'Kelly
Roger Bush	Ron & Lois Pearson
Vernon Cox	Wes & Suzy Perkinson
Dave & Patti Curtiss	Ben Peters
Bob Crabb	Robin Reich
James H. Dixon	Bill Riley
Pat Drake	Bernice Fisher Rinehart
Linda Forsberg	Roy and Sheila Rinker
Arthur & Luverne Foxford	Vern Rockstad
Don & Mary Glaser	Helen Rohlman
Hazel Whitford Miller Goheen	Earl Root
Calvin & Amy Goings	Stan & Margery Salmon
David Hackett	Nancy M. Scraggin
Paul Hackett	Bonnie Starkel
James Hawley	Lori Stock
Philip R. & Shirley M. Healy	Bill Stover
Cecil & Doris Herbert	Marge (Crosson) Swain
Evelyn Swalander Hess	Ralph & Yvonne Thorpe
Charles & Maybelle Hoenhaus	Margo L & Joe Tucci
Matt Holm	Carl Vest
Ernest Hopp	Neil & Celia Vincent
Dale Huff	Joan Vosler
Leslie & Velma Huff	W. Lynn Williams
Jim Kastama	Lenore Nicolet Winton
John Knierim	Ed Zeiger
Art Larson	Hans Zeiger

South Hill Historical Society Officers

President, **Bob Ballou**
Vice-President, **Hans Zeiger**
Secretary, **Debbie Burtnett**
Research Coordinator, **Carl Vest**
Treasurer, **Ben Peters**
Newsletter Editor, **Jerry Bates**
Public Relations Coordinator, **Paul Hackett**

South Hill Historical Society Membership/Renewal Form

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Home E-mail Address _____

Signature _____ Date _____ Renewal, check here

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, 14602 106th Avenue Court E.
South Hill, WA 98374-4905**

History On The Hill is published quarterly
Copyright 2010



14602 106th Avenue Court E.
South Hill, WA 98374-4905

To: