



HERITAGE CORRIDOR

# History On The Hill

The Newsletter of the South Hill Historical Society  
South Hill, Pierce County, Washington

Volume 9 Issue 4 Fall 2011

## Journey's End

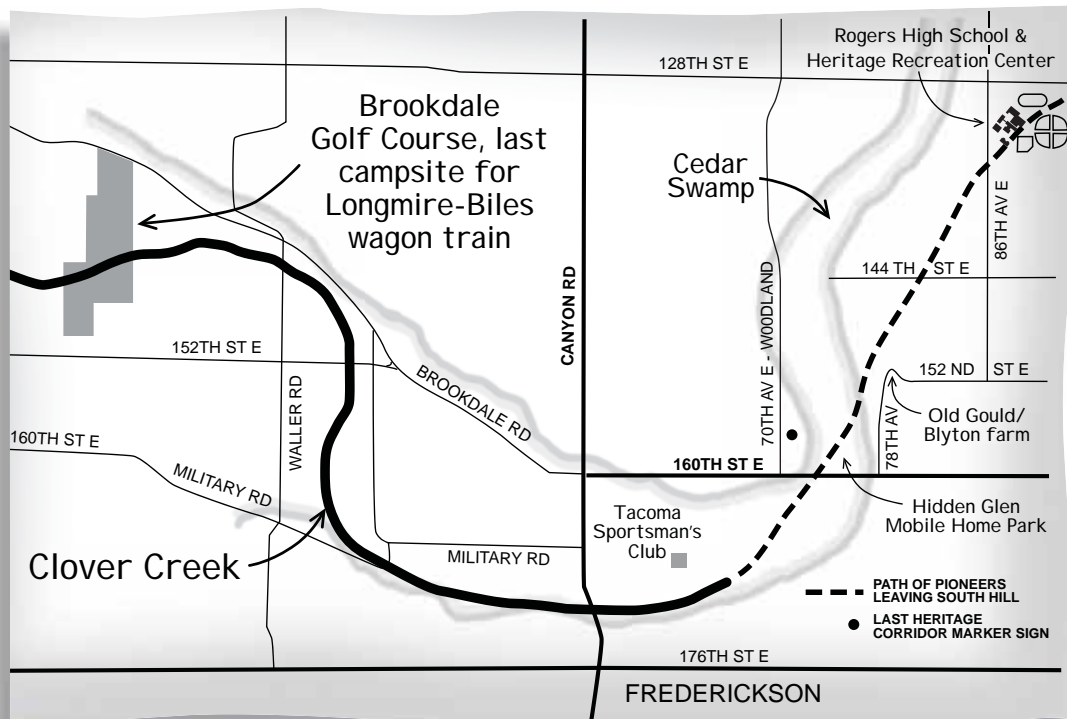
By Jerry Bates

Creaking covered wagons slowly made their way across South Hill 158 years ago last October. A bedraggled Longmire-Biles party was approaching the end of a long journey—crossing a continent to Puget Sound country.

Today, informational signs trace this route through our community—marking a path called the South Hill Heritage Corridor. This name was

ous sections of the road bear this name today.

Naturally, we celebrate the part of the Longmire-Biles journey that crosses South Hill. We end our maps of their route at 70th Ave. and 160th Street East. Here stands our last historic trail marker. The party left South Hill somewhere in this vicinity.



**Leaving South Hill, the Longmire-Biles wagon train descended onto the lower elevation of the Clover Creek basin. They followed Clover Creek to make their last campsite at today's Brookdale Golf Course.**

MAP BY JERRY BATES

given for the route over the Hill in 2001 by a Resolution of the Pierce County Council.

We feature the route on our display maps and printed material. This ancient Indian trail and pioneer route, known as the North Fork of the Oregon Trail, would later become the Military Road between Steilacoom and Walla Walla. Vari-

### Path of Least Resistance

Observing a contour map of South Hill, one sees a gulch or valley running approximately from 112th Street, southwest to Canyon Road. Old-timers knew this gulch as Cedar Swamp. It's believed the wagon train descended into this valley somewhere in the general area of the steep hill you drive down going west on 160th Street after

passing 78th Avenue. Exactly where this, departure from the Hill happened historians are not sure.

After descending onto the lower elevation, the wagon train advanced along the gulch floor to the origin of Clover Creek, approximately where today's Tacoma Sportsman's Club is located. Clover Creek starts from a spring here, and winds its way northwest from this point. The creek's basin made level going for the wagons. Following the creek, they made their last camp where it crosses today's Brookdale Golf Course.

After leaving South Hill, our immigrants no doubt were happy to see the last of the dense old growth fir. Following Clover Creek they entered prairie land. Today it's hard to imagine, but all the Brookdale/Spanaway area for fifty miles around was open country with occasional clusters of oak or fir—easy going for a wagon in any direction. Stories are told of the Indians setting fires to burn away foliage on the prairie for easier deer hunting.

The going got smoother for our weary party along the creek. They had behind them a journey that at the time was considered by many impossible—crossing the Cascades with wagons. After crossing Naches Pass, they faced the task of getting off the mountain and through the dark forests of the plateau region, west of the Cascades, to the Puyallup River Valley.

As mentioned, their last camp was along Clover Creek, at what today are the well-kept greens of the Brookdale Golf Course. Not far from the camp was the homestead of Christopher Mahan, where the women were reintroduced to civilization.

After setting up camp all the men rode off to Fort Steilacoom, leaving the ladies behind. Mrs. Mahan entered the camp and invited some of them to her home for a dinner; it was like a royal banquet for the pioneers, sitting at table to eat, after months on the trail.

Word of the encampment spread quickly. Various welcoming parties arrived—delegations from Olympia and Steilacoom and local farmers pro-

vided produce from their gardens. Chief Factor of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, a subsidiary of the Hudson Bay Company, Dr. William Tolmie, paid a visit. He made a return trip not long after with an ox cart loaded with beef just killed and dressed, refusing to take money for the precious supply.

Welcoming as Dr. Tolmie was, he did warn them not to take land belonging to the company, basically anything north of the Nisqually River. This drove some to cross the river and settle in Yelm and Thurston County.

From this last camp the Longmire-Biles pioneers spread far and wide—most never to meet again. They looked for and found land to homestead and fulfill their dreams of a better life.



**Clover Creek seen today from Waller Road as it enters Brookdale Golf Course.**



**Stone monument at the entrance to Brookdale Golf Course acknowledges the Longmire-Biles encampment.**

# September General Meeting

By Debbie Burnett

Vern Rockstad, long-time member of the South Hill Historical Society, opened the new year with a presentation of his decades of work at Mt. Rainier National Park. Vern spoke a bit about his background. He left the military in 1952 and “didn’t know what I was going to do...but a good friend suggested working on a trail crew before my job with the school system began. I took a job wielding a chain saw. My job title was ‘sawyer.’”

“Rocky”, as he is known, stated that as he traveled from Federal Way, “Mt. Rainier looked so beautiful...we sure are blessed to live in a great state with so much beauty.” And, to prove it, Vern presented a series of slides along with narrative reminding us of Mt. Rainier’s unique history.

The National Park Service website states that “Congress established Mount Rainier National Park on March 2, 1899, reaffirming the nation’s intent to set aside certain areas of outstanding scenic and scientific value for the enjoyment of present and future generations. It is America’s fifth oldest national park, after Yellowstone (1872) and Yosemite, General Grant, and Sequoia, all established in 1890.” Mt. Rainier is also the fifth largest national park in the contiguous United States.

“Since Rainier became a national park in 1899, it is ten years younger than our state,” explained Vern. Washington statehood occurred in November 1889.

Vern has a passion for teaching along with a great love of history and nature. He played a pivotal role in the development of Mount Rainier. “Over many years, but mostly during the Great Depression, almost 98% of the trails were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.” [The CCC was a New Deal program that created jobs for young, unemployed men who built roads, developed parks, planted trees, and worked in



**Vern Rockstad, our speaker for September, held various jobs over the years while working in Mt. Rainier National Park--a sawyer, driver, foreman and contractor who built bridges and overlooks. He said “Gobbler’s Knob” was his favorite of the fire look-outs and described a memorial to Marines lost on the mountain-- a place of “hallowed ground” for their families.**

**Vern talked about a glacier opening up in 1947, and the 1962 Columbus Day storm when thousands of trees came down. He cautions visitors “ to stay on the trails to remain safe; NEVER come between a Mama Bear and her cub; and follow park regulations...including that you carry out your own garbage.”**

erosion-control and flood-control projects for this country. The agency developed over 800 state parks and built more than 46,000 bridges. An astounding three billion trees were planted to prevent another Dust Bowl].

Vern’s favorite work was building the trails-- and four trail groups were emphasized --the Ohanapeosh, White River, Carbon River, and Paradise-Longmire. Vern worked long hours with basic tools such as shovels; hoe digs; chain saws; ADZs; come-along + choker cables; and sledge hammers. “The work was quite dangerous,” he stated.

He suggested accessing the “interpretive trails, which are short trails with signs

along the way describing what you are seeing. These are also nice trails for the disabled to use.” Vern poked extensively about the Wonderland Trail--“one of the most beautiful in the U.S.--ninety miles of hiking that can take ten days to two weeks or more to complete, depending on weather conditions.” Vern encouraged visitors to use the asphalt trails built at Paradise, and recommended the “astounding view of Emmons Glacier, the largest in the lower 48 states, from the ski-lift on Crystal Mountain.”

Vern witnessed a number of historic events over the years. He helped repair recent damage by the 2006 windstorm and flooding. He described fighting a huge forest fire “in 1965, the biggest fire in fifty years...when buses dropped men off at the border of the park...and horses brought in food and equipment needed to fight the fires and feed the firefighters. They had to eat very well.”

Of the ongoing controversy surrounding the proposed name change of Mount Rainier back to its original Native American name, Mt. Tahoma, Vern explained that “Murray Morgan led the movement to change the name...the National Park Service never agreed to that...although calling the mountain by its original name would honor the Native American peoples who used it first. It probably *should* be called Mt. Tahoma.”

## October General Meeting

By Debbie Burtnett

You may know Karla Stover as a published Tacoma historian, but do you see history as she does? “I see a building with a zoo on the roof when I look at The Washington Building,” she relates in one of her comments on an historical building. At the Winthrop Hotel, where a couple danced on a little platform with or under the stars, I see ‘Dancing With the Stars!’” Just recently, Karla was scheduled to speak at the Ruston Community Center. Because her talk was “entitled ‘From Chicken Races to Turkey Trots’, people thought “I was there to teach dancing!”



**Karla Stover, October’s speaker, showed this ingenious device for lighting one’s pathway along the dark, mucky areas in Tacoma. Bottles were cut in half, a candle was placed in the upside down neck and lit. This was known as the “Tacoma Lantern.”**

Let there be no misunderstanding. Born and bred in Tacoma, Karla Stover, a product of public schools all the way through the University of Washington, and a retired Merrill Lynch employee, is an avid historian. Society member Jerry Bates recruited Karla to address the South Hill Historical Society and made the introduction. “I met Karla during a tour of Fern Hill last August and many of you may recall it was the destination of the South Hill trolley. She has published short stories about Tacoma and contributes a monthly column to the Senior Scene with which you may be familiar. She is the author of *Let’s Go Walk About Tacoma*.”

Karla’s gave an overview of the founding of Tacoma and the key players involved--many with names recognized in both Puyallup and on the Hill. Karla asked, “Did you know President Lincoln signed into law a bill granting 40 million acres of land to the Northern Pacific Railroad as an incentive for it to lay rails from Lake Superior to Puget Sound?” Or that this grant would spark a still simmering animosity between Seattle and Tacoma when the telegram was received by Tacoma’s Morton Matthew McCarver : WE HAVE LOCATED THE TERMINUS AT COMMENCEMENT BAY. “Seattle has never gotten

over it, although they reaped the benefits of the Gold Rush, “ stated Karla.

Why Tacoma? Tacoma offered the best site-- 2,700 acres of “unbroken waterfront more than two miles long that bordered on a deepwater port, riparian rights (a right such as access to or use of the shore, bed, and water of one owning riparian land) on an additional 600 acres of tideflats, and 10,000 acres of land south toward Nisqually which included several small lakes and natural parks,” explained Karla.

Other famous names in her stories included Rudyard Kipling whose brutally honest description of the “main streets” of Tacoma made in 1889 were less than complimentary. Eventually, Tacoma became much more civilized--early attributes included the First Central School; a brothel; a visit by Buffalo Bill’s Wild West; cattle grazing in a logged Wright Park; and a variety of minstrel, theater, musical, lectures, and other entertainment.

The railroad, financed by the private banking corporation of Jay Cooke, ran short of money and as a result, a plan to shorten the route took the rails “through Manitou to where the University of Washington-Tacoma now stands--across that part of town. And, the railroad wanted a hotel. Enter the Blackwells to the story!” William and Alice Blackwell eventually became known as “the parents of Tacoma.” Karla has published a pamphlet on *The Blackwell Family and Life on the Wharf-Tacoma* in the 1870s and 1880s. Her talk focused largely upon their contribution to the culture of Tacoma, their many neighbors and the jobs they performed at the hotel; the adoption of their daughters, and the mystery of what became of the girls.

Karla’s talk was full of the interesting details of life in the late 19th century, including discussion on such matters as hygiene; treatment of the Chinese; the trial of Chief Leschi; and the naming of Tacoma’s streets. (Just think of the alphabet).

Karla Stover’s next book, *Hidden Tacoma*, will be released in mid-2012. She may be reached at [karla.stover@gmail.com](mailto:karla.stover@gmail.com).

## November General Meeting

By Jerry Bates

Our November speaker was Don Berger. Don shared with us his method of tracing his own and his wife’s family genealogy. He has spent the past 20 years since his retirement from Weyerhaeuser compiling a book of his families’ ancestors going back to Mark Antony 20 BC, on his wife’s side. His goal was to create something that would stay in the family, a memorial to show his lineage in a graphic way, illustrating genealogical data.

Preserving family history is important. He was horrified to learn that his cousin caught his



**November speaker Don Berger shared his genealogical journey compiling history on both sides of his family.**

grandfather burning family documents in a 55-gallon barrel. Fortunately, his cousin stopped him. Don salvaged some of these documents that helped him in his data gathering effort.

All his family is from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, originally from Germany and England. He uses the Internet exclusively for his research— *Ancestry.com* and *OneGreatFamily.com*—with a

lot of help and advice from the Latter Day Saints Church (LDS).

His mother and father divorced when he was eight. A “wonderful stepfather” raised him. He was greatly influenced by a history teacher who became a mentor putting him on a path of academic achievement.

He discovered he had two great-great grandmothers related to Charlemagne, but later learned that any American with European ancestors could be traced back to Charlemagne. After including five pages of his book on the history of Charlemagne, Don decided to keep going back with his families’ two lines from Charlemagne, to Mark Antony and he finally stopped there—“enough is enough.”

In the process of following his family line back in time, he found 65 kings on his family tree from all over Europe. Delving into the history, he became fascinated with castles. He devoted the last part of his book to castles followed by Coats of arms. His book eventually contained the names of 14,000 people, with a significant number of records on many of them—birth, death, residence, etc. He gathered 1,087 stories/history of individuals, most of them from the Internet with photographs that he added to his book, including the kings.

Don paged through his book, showing pedigree charts of family members—most going back four generations with pictures and graphics describing the relationships. Both books were 250 pages and cost \$221 each to publish through *Ancestry.com*.

Don went on to describe some of his additional research such taking a month to read the 1870 Bucks County Agricultural Census, a detailed survey of individual farms of which his great-grandfather was one of the most successful. One of his great-great grandfathers could well have been the son of a Hessian army soldier during the Revolutionary period. Many Hessian soldiers deserted or stayed in the United States after the war.

Don emphasized a person must be interested in

history to devote the time required to do genealogical research. Many to whom he has shown his book “go to sleep very fast, especially some of my children.”

Don continued to page through both family books detailing some of his chapter on Charlemagne, “father of Europe.” Some pages showed land map illustrations of Europe over the centuries, pages on royalty and his favorite subject, castles.

A boring subject to many, but according to Don, it is the fashion in which it is presented that makes the difference. This is where he believes his highly illustrated books will be of value and passed on to his descendants.

## Glacier on South Hill?

*By Bob Ballou*

Have you seen those big rocks alongside the road, those that would require a huge bulldozer just to move it a few feet? Take a closer look: does it have any impressions or inclusions? Maybe fossils or part of shells attached or sticking out that could be a relic from the past?

Many years ago (12,000 to 13,000 years), a glacier (Cordilleran ice sheet) advanced from British Columbia into Washington state, gouging out part of Puget Sound. In the process, the glacier cut into the marine land base that was pushed East by the tectonic plates from the coastal reaches of the Pacific Ocean. Thus, brachiopods (bivalves, such as clams) and gastropods (univalves, such as snails) ended up in the matrix of rock that you now see. This ice sheet covered northern Washington to beyond the southern reaches of the town of Eatonville, pushing and dropping many tons of gravel and sand along the way—happily for the Corliss Gravel Company!

Oh yes, the state never had any dinosaurs—at least their bones have yet to be found—but we had mastodons roaming about at the time of the ice age. Remnants of bones have been found close to the city of Sequim, on private property,

so don't trespass!\* Yes, our land was covered by ice eons ago.

**Editor's note:** Besides being president the South Hill Historical Society, Bob is a local residential Rockhound.

\* A major skeletal find on the Manis Farm on the northern Olympic Peninsula occurred in 1977. The discovery of 'their' mastodon, said Clare and Emanuel Manis, was a "marvelous disruption" of routine life. Private land became a public legacy when Mrs. Manis donated the mastodon site to the nonprofit National Archaeological Conservancy in 2001. (Carbon dating dated the Manis mastodon at 14,000 calendar years ago).

## SHHS featured at the Puyallup Fair Museum

Most people are unaware that a museum is located on the fairgrounds. Inside the Fair Museum are standing displays and enclosed exhibits which change out from event to event. The 'Make Your Escape' event of 2011 featured the Meeker Historical Society's re-creation of Ezra Meeker's wagon at camp along with the standing display of the South Hill Historical Society. Also, the Naches Coalition Society's display showed a detailed route of the 'North Fork of the Oregon Trail'—which was first used by the Longmire-Biles party 158 years ago when the group chose to cross South Hill via the newer, time-saving route over the lengthier, more well-known Oregon Trail.

Regarding the South Hill Historical Society's display, Curator Catherine Johnson commented, "There was a lot of positive response because not everyone knows about the South Hill Historical Society, and not everyone gets *The Puyallup Herald* [which includes several historical societies research columns during the month]...and not everyone who attends the Fair is from Puyallup. Thus, many fairgoers learned something new!"

The Fair Museum will not be open again until the Spring Fair in April 2012. "There might be minor changes in the cabinet exhibits, but a different display will occupy the center [of the Museum]...We also have an exciting display

planned for mid-September 2012, but we are not ready to reveal that yet," stated Catherine.

*A personal note of condolence from Debbie and Jerry on the untimely passing of Catherine Johnson. She made our time at the Fair Museum more meaningful and fun.*



**Our Society had a display at the Puyallup Fair, Fair Museum, for the 17 day run of the fair.**

## Meanwhile, over at the Pavilion...

Our exposure this year at the fair was greater than ever. In addition to helping setup the Fair Museum display (see above story), Debbie Burtnett, our fair coordinator, was busy with our yearly booth in the Pavilion. Our very popular aerial view photos of South Hill were much improved this year, thanks to a collaborative effort between the Abbey Road Land Development Group and members Debbie Burtnett, Carl Vest and Jerry Bates. Graphics were added to the aerial photo showing the Heritage Corridor/1853 Longmire-Biles route over South Hill, including historic sites, on the updated aerial shot. Thanks to CEO Gil Hulsmann, Denise Johnson and Cassie Porcella at Abbey Road.

Many thanks also to our volunteer docents and helpers.



**Docents Marilyn Burnett and Roy and Sheila Rinker arrived at our 2011 display at the Puyallup Fair Education Pavilion for their shifts.**

## Auld lang syne

Let's stop for a moment and review some of our achievements of this past year—2011.

- We have been working with the Northwest Chapter of the Oregon California Trails Association (OCTA) on a proposal to have the Naches Pass Trail added to the National Trails System.
- The SHHS was officially recognized for its tenth anniversary by Pierce County Resolution.
- Carl Vest continues to publish monthly columns in *The Puyallup Herald* on a variety of South Hill historical topics.
- Interesting monthly speakers have informed and entertained our membership.
- Sunshine Officer Mary Glaser has increased her role with thank-you notes to our speakers while she continues to monitor the need for best wishes for our ailing or lost members.
- Amanda Henry joined the Society as a volunteer, scanning and cataloging our 3,000+ newspaper articles for preservation.
- Society members attended and photographed—the Woodland School Reunion in May—gathering data and history from attendees.
- Bob Ballou, President, arranged a new storage site for the Society's collection at the Fruitland Grange.
- Technological devices to help record and store our oral histories, etc., were purchased this year—a video camera and a one-terabyte external hard drive.
- Exposure to the public increased with a South

Hill Historical Society display at the Fair Museum in addition to our exhibit in the Education Pavilion.

- Carl Vest addressed the South Hill Rotary Club with an overview of the organization and two stories—that of the wagon crossing and the balloon bombs.
- South Hill's library maintains a disk of our materials for student use.

Also, many thanks for the donations that help the Society to fulfill its mission including: from the Glaser family, films from 1955-1978; Cecil Herbert and Marilyn H. Burnett, family records; Dorothy Norris for allowing us to scan her 'Snapshots' album; the Abbey Road Group, CEO Gil Hulsmann and staff for aerial maps and graphics; monetary donations including one in memory of Chris O'Kelly; all of the networking and sharing of members' connections, personal papers, stories, and financial support. The officers sincerely thank you for all you do. The work of the Society goes on because of its membership.

## No December Meeting

*See everyone January 17, 2012*



*Merry Christmas and  
Happy New Year from  
the officers of the South  
Hill Historical Society.*

### In Memoriam

The South Hill Historical Society  
regrets the passing of

**Christopher O'Kelly**



# From the Treasurer

by Ben Peters

A warm welcome to new members

**Teresa Best, Ira Gabrielson &  
Terry Maves**

Please call, e-mail or write any change of address to me, Ben Peters, 253-845-7028, *poppa-ben2002@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. If you need a receipt for tax purposes, contact Ben.**

## 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.

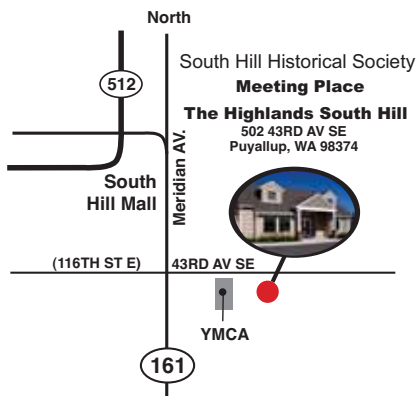
## Dues Reminder

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

## 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

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# 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**



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

To: