

## Captain John Swanson

by Jerry Bates

**H**UDSON Bay Company naval Captain Swanson returned from the past during our April 2018 General Meeting by way of historical reenactor Dave Rogers.

Captain John Swanson was a life-long employee of the Hudson Bay Company starting at the early age of fourteen. He was born to a seafaring family in 1794 on Hudson Bay. He became a company ship's captain by age twenty-five.

His experience on Puget Sound begins in the 1830s—we'll let the captain tell his story...

*When the company established itself on Puget Sound, we had Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River and Fort Langley up north (Canada). We wanted a halfway point in between—we ended up with Fort Nisqually. At first it was a very small operation on the mouth of Sequatchew Creek where the Sequatchew branch of the Nisqually tribe was living. As time went by, a couple of years, we moved up on the hill above. Things changed and grew and eventually the fort became what can be seen as Fort Nisqually at Point Defiance Park nowadays.*

*In the beginning, the whole name of the game were these things right here (the captain holds a beaver pelt). Beaver fur would be transformed into*



Reenactor Dave Rogers as Captain John Swanson

the ever popular beaver hat (holding a hat) this one is an original. A tremendous amount of money was made capturing beaver and turning them into hats.

Arranged on the table before him were trade items.

*These are samples of things we would trade with Native Americans for their furs or in exchange for opportunities to work for us. They could build trade credit—we had wonderful relationship with the Indians. The relationship also benefited by the Company that sent only men to the Pacific Northwest—if you wanted a wife it was a native. We were working with them, trading with them, a great relationship—until the Americans showed up.*

*My ship, the Beaver was remarkable in its day; built in London 1835, it arrived out here in 1836—the first steamship to operate on the West Coast. It was a paddle wheel design powered by two single-cylinder engines making about thirty-six horsepower each. These were rather feeble for their time, they were called vacuum engines, steam would be pumped into the cylinder cooled and the vacuum would pull the piston powering the ship. They produced a lot of torque and could turn big paddle wheels. Even under sail it would move faster than other cruise ships. It was very stoutly built so it could run aground when the tide went out. It had great historical significance in this area. The Beaver had a sister ship that came out about ten years later, I got to captain that one as well...*

The captain continued his reminisces, adding his comments to our slides of today's Fort Nisqually and answering questions from April's attendees.

### **Reenactor Dave Rogers, Fort Nisqually advocate**

Dave was born in Puyallup and grew up in Edgewood; he worked on the 737-757 program before retiring from the Boeing Company. After retir-

ing and looking for something to do, he became interested in Fort Nisqually and is currently very involved in their programs and activities. Dave is quite an expert and enthusiast of fort history; he has docent responsibilities incorporating his reenactor skills.

The original Fort Nisqually stood at DuPont, WA, where it was the nerve center of a vast agricultural enterprise of 160,000 acres between the Nisqually and Puyallup Rivers (including South Hill.) The fort was recreated at Point Defiance Park in 1930s as a WPA project during The Great Depression. A few original buildings still standing on the site in the 1930s were moved to the



**The popularity of this hat made beaver pelts the most profitable trade item between local tribes and the Hudson Bay Company. The hat was made of felted beaver fur and was a prized item worn by European gentlemen for hundreds of years. So valuable that it was passed down in family wills to sons and grandsons. A typical working class man would have to work a year to purchase such a hat.**

park, among them the granary and the chief factor's house. The granary is the oldest existing wooden structure in the state of Washington. It's currently full of period farming implements and other display items. The chief factor's house was built in 1855, and after moving from the original site has been carefully restored. It's furnished with correct period furniture, fixtures and artifacts. The cookhouse behind the factor's house is still used to prepare food on cast iron stoves following recipes of the time. For example, eggs are used from the same variety of chickens at the fort during the 1850s; they're still raised at the fort. The cooks use a functioning root cellar with produce preserved and stored—also grown at today's fort.

Many events once celebrated by the Hudson Bay Company continue throughout the year including Queen Victoria's birthday, when Dave demonstrates black powder firearms, firing salutes to the queen under the British flag, and giving the public a try at using the old weapons. A six-pounder canon is also fired.

Dave concluded our February meeting by offering volunteer applications to join Fort Nisqually "for those who want to go beyond being history geeks to be super geeks and live the life!"



# First Footprints on Commencement Bay

by Jerry Bates

Dr. Jerry Ramsey made his second visit to the South Hill Historical Society for the March General Meeting. He first visited in May of 2016. At that time, he had just published his new book *Stealing Puget Sound*. The book is now in its fourth printing and Jerry is very pleased with the book's success. *Stealing Puget Sound* covers the conflict between the European and American powers that collectively stole the land from Native Americans.

Jerry's March talk continued on that theme. He began with a timeline of world events for historical perspective. When the Pyramids were built in Egypt, there was a culture here on Puget Sound fully established and very prosperous. "Twelve thousand years ago we had footprints on Puget Sound... they were the Salish folks," said Jerry. The Muckleshoot and Puyallup tribes were part of the Salish culture. The Washington Indians were spread east and west of the Cascades with a similar language. "They could understand each other," explained Jerry.

The Spanish were the first Europeans to have contact with Northwest Indians. The Macaw Indians greeted them in 1774 while the Spanish were exploring; hence

today's names of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Port Angeles, Fidalgo Island, etc. With little regard for the ancient culture already established here for thousands of years, the Spanish claimed the entire coastline from Alaska, where the Russians were already active, to Mexico. In 1778, the English explorer Captain Cook claimed this coastline for England. And in 1792 Captain Robert Gray claimed it for the United States.

The Salish tribes were coastal—i.e., living along the shores of Puget Sound—locating their villages where creeks met salt water, where the salmon migrated upstream to spawn. "Why?" asked Jerry, "because that's where the food was." Jerry explained, "Anthropologists have determined Puget Sound tribes may have been the wealthiest aboriginal people in any culture in the world—ever. The climate didn't require much clothing (which was easily made out of cedar bark), food was easily available for all you had to do was go down to the beach and dig some clams, oysters, mussels, or catch a fish. Salmon ran every year. The Indians constructed a series of overlapping fences so that when the salmon would swim in against the tide, they could block them off, and the salmon could not figure out how to turn around so they were then simply picked out of the water—much easier than what we do today!"



Dr. Jerry Ramsey

Dr. Ramsey holds a unique theory regarding the native Asian migration to this continent (ancestors to our Indian tribes) by way of the land bridge that at one time connected North American to Asia. He questions the theory that large groups of people set out to "cross over" by way of the available land



Image thanks to Dr. Jerry Ramsey

**This photo shows the size and beauty of the Salish canoes. They could hold 55 men plus tons of cargo. In 1901, such a canoe sailed around the world.**

bridge, as anthropologists believe. Says Jerry, "it was cold, not a lot of plants to eat, not a lot of animals, so what did they eat—carry food from Asia? They didn't know a land bridge was there?" He proposes that Asian tribes were coastal people with "wonderful canoes." The young people of the tribes—wishing to move on and establish their independence or start their own villages—continually moved along the coast to the next creek,

generation after generation. This process over hundreds and hundreds of years brought them to Alaska, and eventually to Puget Sound.

Much more was covered by Dr. Ramsey including early European exploration, a detailed look at our local tribes' temperament, lifestyle and genius in adapting to their environment. The many uses of cedar for clothing, canoes and building material for their large dwellings—no teepees for coastal Indians. All these subjects were embellished by many handouts shared with the audience.

We always enjoy Jerry's visits and congratulate him on the success of his book *Stealing Puget Sound*.

## Tribal Dwellings



**Pictured above is another image Dr. Ramsey shared with our April attendees; Salish tribes on Puget Sound used such dwellings. In 2016, members may recall, the Puyallup Tribe's director of historical preservation, Brandon Reynon, and fellow tribe member Nicole Barandon, explained to our group how South Hill was the tribe's "abundant resource" that provided many things including berries, black bear, elk, deer, and even roots. But no villages were on the Hill—rather, hunting camps that consisted of shelters that could be torn down and reassembled. Those shelters, no doubt, were probably similar in appearance to the illustration above. As Dr. Ramsey informed us, the large permanent dwellings were constructed with split cedar planks, light and waterproof. The planks were assembled to form walls using pole guides with cords to secure everything in place. The roof planks, besides shedding rain, were easily moved from inside to allow smoke to escape from cooking and heating fires.**

## Ezra Lives?

by Jerry Bates



**Reenactor Dave Rogers and Pat Drake perform at the April General Meeting. This was Dave's second visit to our Society; for this visit, the versatile reenactor portrayed Ezra Meeker.**

Pat Drake and Dave Rogers have given the Meeker interview to the local Kiwanis and Rotary clubs. Their subject—saving history, a passion shared by Meeker in his day and Pat Drake today. She's currently working hard to introduce "local" history into our elementary school's curriculum. Pat is also devoted to the effort to save the old Firgrove School.

The mock interview gave Ezra a chance to reflect on just a few parts of his extraordinary, and long, life. He recalled his youth and upbringing, coming west; his role as hop king and the latter part of his life spent trying to save the Oregon Trail. Pat interjected with the current effort to save the 1935 Firgrove School whose original founder was John Joseph Patzner in 1895.

Pat's family history has a connection Ezra Meeker. In 1910, her great-grandfather, an early racecar driver, was pictured talking with the old pioneer—comparing the covered wagon and the Moline car—suggesting that next time Ezra could use a car to cross the Oregon Trail.

Pat spent the last part of the meeting updating our gathering on the current efforts to organize



the South Hill community in a campaign to save the old Firgrove School from demolition. Many in audience joined in conversation with memories of attending the old school. Some old-timers told stories going back to the 1940s.

## Rock and Roll Legend Born on South Hill Passes

by Jerry Bates

Nokie Edwards, lead guitarist for the 1960's rock 'n' roll band, The Ventures, passed away March 12 in Yuma, Arizona, at age 82. We last wrote about Nokie in this newsletter for Spring of 2008. At that time the band had been inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the ceremony was carried by a live feed to the Liberty Theater in Puyallup.



1960 album cover The Ventures 'Walk Don't Run'

Nokie has special relevance for our Society—he was born on the Hill. His family lived at the Rabbit Farms (in those days the reference for South Hill.)

In that 2008 newsletter, Society member Joan Voss shared the following memories of the family:

*All of his family was very talented musicians. His sister, Louise, could play anything on the piano you could hum. She couldn't read music, but who*

*needs to when you have that talent. All of the Edwards family played: fiddle, guitar, bass fiddle, etc. Nokie was the only one that took his talent to a higher level. I do believe all are deceased except Louise and Nokie. I was thrilled when they made it into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. But The Ventures were very diverse and played country, swing, etc. We bought their records in Pennsylvania, and it was my husband who noticed Nokie's name on the album cover. We said, "Holy cow, that's little Nokie Edwards!"*

The *New York Times*, March 16, 2018, related in an article about Nokie Edwards' life that the family and their 11 children were migrant fruit workers. Before Nokie was born, they fled their Oklahoma farm, owned by his mother and her Cherokee family after violent disputes with merchants who wanted them to sell it. Traveling in a horse-drawn wagon over the Great Plains, they stopped for a brief time in Idaho but settled in Puyallup, WA (South Hill.)

Nokie continued with the band as lead guitarist until 1968, returned in 1972 and stayed until 1984. The Ventures, after many permutations, are still active.

by Jerry Bates  
In recent years Nokie formed a company making custom guitars called HitchHikers, a hybrid of his design. He played his last show January 2017 with the HitchHiker Band in Medford, Oregon, performing in very poor health. Yet, he refused to cancel the show after which he was hospitalized.



Nokie Edwards

Nokie Edwards website

# Some of These Faces May Look Familiar

by Jerry Bates

Yes, you may recognize members of the South Hill Historical Society, pictured here in the Wednesday, April 18, 2018 *Puyallup Herald*. They and others are working hard at forming a community group to save the old brick Firgrove School—destined for demolition. A similar effort started in 2009 when the Puyallup School District first announced the old school would have to go—pending that year’s school levy and bond passing. The school bond and levy failed; with no funding for a new school the old school’s fate went on hold. Almost a decade later the building is due for demolition again, thanks to the passage of 2015 school bond. The new Firgrove Elementary School’s construction is moving forward.

The “Save Our School” committee is active again (S.O.S Firgrove.) Now with the power of social media, the word is spreading fast. They have been busy holding meetings, planning events, recruiting members and volunteers. Our member and Society Vice-President Terry Maves appeared before the March 27 Pierce County Council where Council member Dan Roach announced his support. The group is in search of grants and other funding and hope to get the old building included on the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation.

Why save the school?

These are the points the committee is stressing:

- *Firgrove School is the oldest public structure in South Hill*
- *Built in 1935, the building was funded by community-voted bond and Public Works Administration monies*
- *It’s a monument to the South Hill community’s dedication to giving our children the best learning environment*
- *Honors of the dedication of J.J. Patzner (who donated land in 1895 and secured PWA funds in 1935)*



It would be a shame to let this symbol of South Hill History be destroyed for commercial development.

Join or donate and support the effort!  
**#SaveFirgrove, #SOSFirgrove, or by mail S.O.S. Firgrove, c/o South Hill Historical Society, South Hill, WA 98374.**



The old Firgrove School

# From the Treasurer

by Ben Peters

*Welcome to New Member*  
**Bruce Carpenter**

Please call, e-mail or write any change of address to me, Ben Peters, 253-845-7028, poppa-ben2002@yahoo.com, South Hill Historical Society, Box 73582, 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.**

### Dues Reminder

I will attach a sticky note to the Society newsletter mailed closest to your renewal date. **No need to fill out the membership form unless there is a change of some kind.**

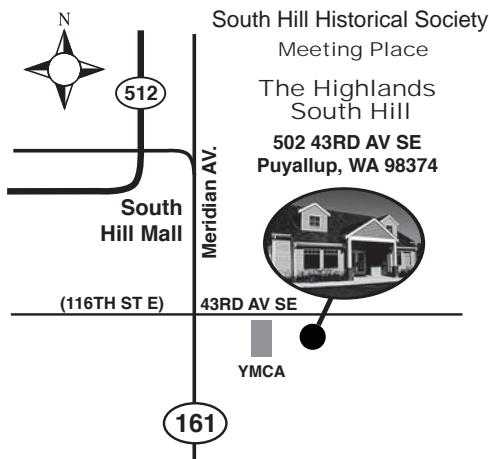
The South Hill Historical Society meets regularly on the **THIRD TUESDAY** of the month, 11:00 AM, (no meetings July and August) at The Highlands in the Community Center. This complex is located at 502 43rd Ave. SE, adjacent to and east of the Mel Korum YMCA.

We welcome you to our monthly meetings. For more information, contact Wes Perkinson at (253) 241-5397.

## In Memoriam

The South Hill Historical Society  
regrets the passing of

**W. Lynn Williams**



# Our Current Members

Andy G. Anderson	Terry Maves
Andy & Ruth Anderson	Laurienne Stewart Minnich
Elizabeth Anema	Bob Moltke
Marion Armstrong	Carolyn Nelson
Bob Ballou	Dorothy Nelson
Jerry Bates	Juanita Nordin
Susan Beals	Dorothy Norris
Katherine Bennett	Ron Pearson
Teresa Best	Wes & Suzy Perkinson
Marilyn Burnett	Ben Peters
Debbie Burtnett	Dr. Jerry Ramsey
Bruce Carpenter	Robin Reich
Vernon Cox	Bill Riley
Gary Cressman	Gail Rinehart
Dave & Patti Curtiss	Vern Rockstad
Robert & Lynn Daughtery	Helen Rohlman
Karen Day	Earl Root
Pat Drake	Stan Salmon
Joan Ellis	Dave Smarr
Ira Gabrielson	Mark Starkel
Mary Glaser	Lori Stock
Calvin Goings	Marge (Crosson) Swain
Paul Hackett	Ralph & Yvonne Thorpe
Alberta Hagen	Jade Trevere
Evelyn Swalander Hess	Margo L. & Joe Tucci
Wilma Walsworth Hinshaw	Lee Van Pevenage
Alan & Linda Hoenhaus	Carl Vest
Joe & Rhoda Hoenhaus	Neil & Celia Vincent
Maybelle Hoenhaus	Joan Vosler
Matt Holm	Lenore Nicolet Winton
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Gary Leicht	Allan S. & Ellen M. Zulauf
John & Carrie Loshbough	Beverley Zook
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### South Hill Historical Society Officers

*President, Wes Perkinson*  
*Vice-President, Terry Maves*  
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**[southhillhistory.com](http://southhillhistory.com)**

History On The Hill is published quarterly  
Editor Jerry Bates, Editor-at-Large Debbie Burtnett

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# South Hill Historical Society Membership/Renewal Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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:

**South Hill Historical Society, Box 73582,  
South Hill, WA 98374**



**HERITAGE CORRIDOR**

Box 73582  
South Hill, WA 98374

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To: