



HERITAGE CORRIDOR

# History On The Hill

The Newsletter of the South Hill Historical Society

Volume 8 Issue 2 Spring 2010

For most South Hill residents the McMillin Reservoir is out of sight, out of mind. The reservoir is hidden away behind the trees, where 128th Street East merges into Reservoir Road.

It's ironic that probably the oldest and definitely the largest man-made piece of history on South Hill is rarely seen or much thought of, unless of course, you happen to fly over it. The reservoir has been here since 1912. Other than location, it's much more Tacoma's history than ours. But we live around it and although it's named "McMillin" Reservoir and its water was for Tacoma, its home is South Hill. Longtime residents who belong to our society have many memories and associations with it — so the South Hill Historical Society can definitely claim the reservoir as our history, too.

## Why is it here?

The story of the McMillin Reservoir starts over one hundred years ago. For those living in Tacoma around the turn of nineteenth century, one thing was of uppermost importance—even more desirable than having electricity to their homes was the need for a clean, plentiful water supply.

It's hard to imagine Tacoma in need of water as it's literally surrounded by it. Of course, most of that is salt water—not drinking water. But lakes,



Tacoma Public Utilities McMillin Reservoir, part of our history

springs and creeks are also numerous within the city limits. However as time went by, these sources were failing to safely and efficiently satisfy demand.

Generally, in early Tacoma, tap water/drinking water was furnished by wells and open flumes from creeks and springs. In the beginning this was fine for its small population, but in the 1890s the population was exploding and the scattered water sources rapidly became inadequate. Wells went dry, run-off from outhouses and septic tanks in local creeks made water filthy and with that came sickness and even a typhoid fever epidemic. It became obvious to the city fathers that their growing town needed

a large source of fresh, pure water for current and future generations. After all, many thought, Tacoma was destined to be the New York City of the Pacific Northwest.

### Where to go?

Reliable sources of fresh water in the volume needed were actually few. Although South Tacoma sat on top of a huge aquifer, pumping and drilling technology of the time could not tap that supply. Then current, and possible sources such as Maplewood Springs in Puyallup; Lake Kapowsin; Clear Lake; American Lake; Spanaway Lake; Clover Creek all took their turn as candidates but were eventually rejected for one reason or another. One answer for Tacoma's water problems was finally agreed on—the Green River. It would furnish an endless supply of pristine mountain water.

### From the river to Tacoma by way of the McMillin Reservoir

In 1910 the voters of Tacoma finally agreed to the Green River plan. Work went forward in 1911 to build a gravity line to bring water from the river to Tacoma. It would travel from 900 feet elevation at the Green River station to 100 feet elevation at the "J" Street sandpipe. The Green River pipeline starting point was twenty miles due east of Tacoma in King County. However, the pipeline would not follow a straight line drawn on a map. The actual pipeline would have to cover a much longer route, approximately forty-three miles in all, contending with timber, brush, reluctant landowners, weather, and bureaucracy.

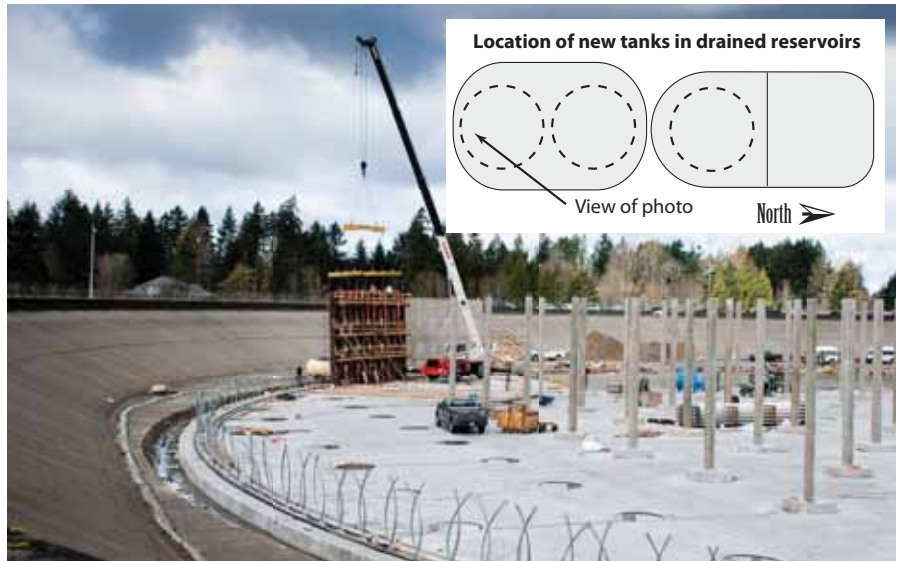
The pipe was 60 to 39 inches in diameter, made of wooden stave. The line would follow the Northern Pacific Railroad right-of-way through Palmer, Cumberland, and Enumclaw to Buckley; then across the valley to a huge 16 acre, 105 million gallon receiving basin located on South Hill, then called McMillin. From there the pipeline would take an almost straight path northwest

to Tacoma.

The total system, considering all the politics and other obstacles, would take only two years to build. Beginning July 12, 1913, Tacomans had Green River water in their homes. It was the largest municipal project in Tacoma history up to that time.

As Tacoma's needs continued to grow, a second reservoir was built to the south next to the original in 1956. The second 110 million gallon basin was completed in record time from December 1955 to its completion in November 1956.

The McMillin Reservoir story continues today with extensive upgrading construction currently in progress (see photo caption below).



**The above photo was taken in March 2010, looking southwest from the edge of the second 1955 addition to the McMillin Reservoir. The first new tank wall segment can be seen going up in the background; this will be the first of three 33 million gallon tanks to be built. They will be constructed in the drained old reservoir basins. The finished floor of the first new tank can be seen in the foreground of this picture containing the vertical tank lid supports. These new tanks are needed primarily to improve water quality. Open reservoirs are currently being replaced or covered all across America. Also driving this effort are issues related to Homeland Security Agency recommendations. The project was started last August and will be complete at the end of 2011.**

**Sadly, the aerial view of the McMillin Reservoir will be a bit less majestic in the future.**

# Naches Trail Coalition Formed

The third meeting presented by Dave Welch of the Oregon-California Trails Association was held at the Meeker Mansion Saturday April 10, 2010. As a reminder, these meetings are an effort to bring together interested local historical societies and individuals to officially map the Naches Pass extension of the Oregon Trail.

With the Passage of the 2009 Public Land Management Act, the National Trails System has been expanded. With this expansion feasibility studies are going forward to map the Naches Pass Trail with funding from the National Parks System.

Mr. Welch will meet with Jeri Krakow of the Trails System Office this June to offer Coalition support, and also tour parts of the trail with Jeri Krakow at that time.

The local group is planning a series of tours up to and over the Naches Pass late this summer. At the Saturday meeting, possible projects including Website and brochure efforts were discussed. Also, we agreed on an official name for the group—the Naches Trail Coalition.

Don Glaser and Jerry Bates represented our Society at the meeting.

Contact the Editor (*see page 6*) for more information. Also, an overview of the 2009 Public Land Management Act, and how it affects our society, can be found in the Summer 2009 *History on the Hill* Newsletter. Member Carl Vest has written on this effort also for the *Puyallup Herald*. His article is on our website [southhillhistory.com](http://southhillhistory.com). Click on the History link and scroll down to the article entitled *South Hill will be part of historical trails study*.

# February General Meeting



Thanks goes to our Treasurer, Ben Peters, for inviting Len Simonson of Pierce Transit to give a talk at our February General Meeting. Mr. Simonson gave a very informative and entertaining PowerPoint presentation covering the history and workings of the bus company. He oriented his talk towards Pierce Transit history and current issues facing the system. Mr. Simonson pointed out many historical locations in the history of mass transit in Pierce County using photographs from the past as well as facts about costs to riders; retirees; and new features including light rail and changes wrought by the 1990 Clean Air Act. He described many services available today and 'going green' with the use of compressed natural gas.

A question and answer period followed, with Simonson providing the customer service phone number and Website address to SHHS members. When queried about the need for more shelters, he cited the cost to the city at \$6000 each. He also discussed reduced senior fares. Simonson mentioned the financial challenges facing the bus company as a result of the severe recession. Existing routes and senior services will be affected. Seventy percent of Pierce Transit's funding comes from sales tax and that revenue is down 20% this year.



# March General Meeting



*Leslie Huff*

We love to encourage South Hill old-timers to give talks and share their memories about how it was back then... Leslie Huff did a fine job for our March general meeting, beginning with his memories about the Firgrove School. His history included the early structure called Patzner's School and he remembers there was no running water at the school. A large milk can was placed at Patzner's place and everyone drank with a metal dipper. When the current Firgrove was built, he recalled, "the new school was really super..."

Other memories followed ranging from finding a snake with a large bulge in it and opening the bulge with a pocket knife to reveal the snake's meal--a big toad! Other memories included hikes to the bluff over the Puyallup River in the cold weather; writing names on bridges; 4-H Camp at the Lake. Leslie Huff concluded his talk with the retirement of his father in 1951 and moving to property in the Valley.

After Leslie's talk, Mary Glaser commented that the search goes on for any picture that might exist of the older Firwood School-Patzner's School.

# April General Meeting



*Hans Zeiger*

For our April General Meeting member Hans Zeiger gave a talk on the growth and development of South Hill. His topic: "What is the South Hill?" An interesting history of the various settlements by a variety of ethnicities followed. As a member of South Hill's Historical Society, Zeiger feels that he can best serve the community by working to unite the fragmented neighborhoods into a unified identity. South Hill was born of farming families in their respective neighborhoods--the Willows; Alderton; Firgrove; Woodland, etc. Hans reviewed some of the historical events that happened in South Hill during the war, and described the various periods of growth as the area began "growing big time."

Hans breaks down the growth on the hill into four general periods: the old-timers; post WW II settlers; those who grew up in the area but moved to live on the Hill; and the most recent newcomers, who use the Hill as a bedroom community while commuting to their jobs outside the area.

Hans is currently a candidate for State Representative, 25th District.

# Happy 100!



Hazel Whitford Miller Goheen

Hazel Whitford Miller Goheen, has seen a lot of history on the Hill. Hazel was our very special guest for our April meeting. Hazel last visited us in 2005. She currently lives in Blaine, where she was born May 3, 1910. Hazel started teaching at the first Firgrove School on Patzner Road in 1929. She was very active in Pierce County 4-H activities in the 1930s

and 1940s. In 1939 she was one of hundreds of volunteers that built the Fruitland Grange Hall. During WWII, she worked at the Todd shipyards and after the War went back to teaching at Firgrove School. Celebrating her 100th birthday with the Historical Society was a treat for us and the group congratulated her with a "Happy Birthday" serenade.

# Contributions & Leadership Appreciated



During our March meeting, Don Glaser, right, was awarded some well-earned recognition. Bob Ballou, on behalf of our society membership, presented a Certificate of Honor to Don. Don and his wife Mary have both given large amounts of time and energy to the success of our organization. The certificate listed some Don's achievements:

- *Serving as president of the South Hill Historical Society for two years*
- *For introducing the membership to the Naches Trail*
- *For lining up pioneer speakers for two years*
- *For having lived on South Hill all his life and being in a unique position to help establish the history of South Hill*
- *For contributing first-hand stories of his grandparents' lives and stories of early life on the Hill*
- *For coordinating a huge Firgrove School reunion held in August 2009*
- *For being a charter member, we thank you, Don!*

## Second Annual Firgrove School Reunion

*It was such a success last year the Reunion committee decided to do it again! Join the fun, the potluck picnic & reunion will be held, August 7, 2010, from 11 AM to 6 PM at the Meridian Habitat Park. Organizers Katie Bennett and Don Glaser would welcome anyone who wants to help out. For more details, call Katie at 253-845-1207 or Don at 253-845-2885.*

# Work to be done!

Our Public Relations officer, Paul Hackett, has drawn up a detailed list of things volunteers can do to help out our Society. Paul presented this at our March Officers meeting. The following list is a summary. Please give Paul a call or e-mail and volunteer some time for good of the society.

## Write Letters

Using SHHS stationery, four volunteers are needed, each to write ten letters to fair booth contacts interested in our Society.

## Transcribe Tapes

Most all of our interviews have been recorded on VHS tape. For archival reasons, these VHS tapes must be converted digitally to CDs. This is not technical stuff, mostly loading and monitoring a VCR-to-CD transfer device, furnished by Ben Peters.

## Community Exposure

Promote Society at local stores/banks/library. This effort would need two or three docents to set up a booth or the Society tent at local establishments and hand out Society info, much like what we do at the Fair. This would require

volunteers to make contacts, set up, and man a booth.

## Prepare news clippings for storage

Paul has, at his home, six bins of hanging folders full of news clippings that must be organized. This will take three volunteers who take two bins each home and bring them back to Paul. Paul is in the process of transferring these bins from his home to our storage facility in Sumner.

Contact Paul: 253-845-7691 or [phackettj@comcast.net](mailto:phackettj@comcast.net)

*Help the newsletter  
Do you have a story about old times on  
South Hill?*

*Personal experiences and past events are of interest to all our members, and it makes for a better newsletter! We are glad to assist, if you wish, with writing or editing your article.*

The Editor: Jerry Bates at  
[jerrybates@mac.com](mailto:jerrybates@mac.com) or call 253-848-6558

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<b>South Hill Historical Society Membership/Renewal Form</b>		
<b>Name</b>		
<b>Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	
<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Zip</b>
<b>Home E-mail Address</b>		
<b>Signature</b> _____	<b>Date</b> _____	<b>Renewal, check here</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Annual Dues: Society membership \$25.00</b> <i>Note Please do not send cash.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Make check or M.O. payable to South Hill Historical Society and mail with this application to: <b>SHHS Membership, 14602 106th Avenue Court E. South Hill, WA 98374-4905</b></p>		

# From the Treasurer

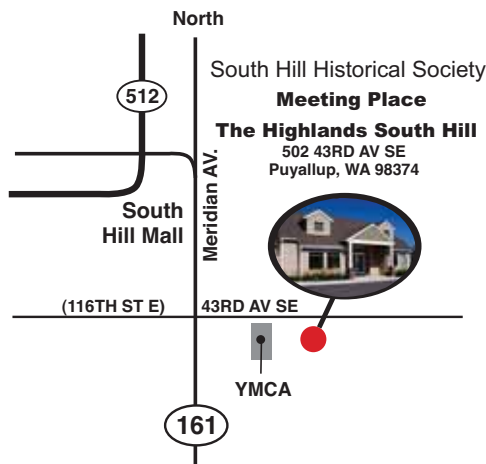
by Ben Peters

Please 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.

## 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**.



### South Hill Historical Society Officers

President, **Bob Ballou**  
 Vice-President, **vacancy**  
 Secretary, **Yvonne Thorpe**  
 Research Coordinator, **Carl Vest**  
 Treasurer, **Ben Peters**  
 Newsletter Editor, **Jerry Bates**  
 Public Relations Coordinator, **Paul Hackett**

# 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 and 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                  |

### Updated Roster Available

A printed roster including members' home and e-mail address, plus phone number is available on request (**restricted to members only**). Call Ben Peters at 253-845-7028.

### Dues Reminder

Treasurer Ben Peters will attach a sticky note to the Society newsletter mailed closest to your renewal date.





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South Hill, WA 98374-4905

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**To:**