

## Camp Harmony

by Jerry Bates



Moderator Eileen Yamada Lamphere (right), joins Cho Shimizu and Elsie Yotsuuye Taniguchi in panel discussion of their lives and incarceration, as children, at the "Puyallup Assembly Center."

**AS THEY SAY**, history comes alive when listening to the people who were there and lived it. We were fortunate to have three Japanese American speakers at our October General Meeting, two of who were sent as small children, with their families, to Washington State's only concentration camp during WWII—Camp Harmony—at the Puyallup Fairgrounds.

### 1942

Surviving old-timers tell us local kids at the time just knew that 1942 was the year they wouldn't get free tickets to the Puyallup Fair. However, if you were of Japanese descent living from Alaska through Western Washington, memories were much more grim.

We were at war with Japan. On February 19th, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 to forcefully remove 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry from America's west coast—two-thirds of whom were America citizens.

The federal government had taken over the Puyallup Fairgrounds, March 30, 1942, turning it into the "Puyallup Assembly Center." It was nicknamed, "Camp Harmony" by a Seattle news editor when he noticed how peaceful and cooperative the residents were. However, the accommodations were far from adequate. It was rapidly built in twenty-seven days, enclosed by barbed wire, with fences, guard towers, and guns to contain those living inside from escaping. The fairgrounds were divided into large encampments including the Blue, Red and Gold parking lots, with the main area on the fairgrounds itself centered at the grandstand on the racetrack. Row after row of shed-like structures/barracks were built. All detainees would use communal bathrooms and showers with no doors or individual stalls and they had to walk outside to access the facilities. For some, the bathroom would be a block or two away along muddy corridors. It was a record wet, cold winter and the flimsy, hastily built living quarters were leaky and cold. Available horse stalls were used as rooms for the older couples

and couples without children.

Guest Eileen Yamada Lamphere, President of the Puyallup Valley Chapter JAACL (Japanese American Citizens League) moderated a panel discussion with Elsie Yotsuuye Tani-guchi and Cho Shimizu. Elsie and Cho shared their memories as young children living in the camp. The group referenced Power-Point slides of life inside the camp, including family portraits, while giving us their personal histories of farm life in Fife prior to detention.

Elsie: "My family owned their property, my mother was born here and a citizen, they were very successful truck farmers growing radishes, lettuce, onions and cauliflower, our family farm was named Brookville Garden... Japanese farms from the White River to Puyallup Valley sold 70 to 80 percent of all the produce at the Pike Place Market in Seattle. It was quite an impact for the market when the Japanese supply was suddenly cut off."

The Japanese had their own packinghouse in Sumner because other local packinghouses had never accepted produce from Japanese farms.

Cho: "We didn't own the land we farmed. I was born on the Puyallup Indian Reservation. We and a lot of Japanese farmers leased Indian land in Fife considered worthless for farming; it was swamp land, [but]

we made it farmable, cut down the trees, drained and leveled it and established irrigation systems. The land was virgin with rich soil that grew really good vegetable crops."



**View from the Puyallup Fair grandstand looking east in 1942 shows the barracks continuing onto fair parking lots.**

pared. "They could only take what they could carry. They had to bring their own linen, towels etc., eating utensils, [but] no knives or chop sticks (possible weapons)— imagine what you had to leave behind, heirlooms, family chests, etc."



**Doing laundry while detained at the "Puyallup Assembly Center."**

Among Cho's comments he described his large family; six of the eight brothers served in the military, two during WWII. Unlike Elsie's family, they lost their lease when detained, and had no farm or land to come back to.

Moderator Eileen explained that Executive Order 9066 caught the Japanese unpre-

pared. "Pierce County ordered us to register within two days at the Fairgrounds, [and] we were given five days to physically report for incarceration at the fairgrounds—not much time to dispose of equipment and belongings. The competing farms were waiting to take our equipment left behind that we would never see again." We were only allowed to take to the fairgrounds what we could carry;

Mother put all our clothing in bed sheets."

Elsie: "Mother told me we would need to move within two weeks and to take whatever you can

carry; I wanted to take my kitten Fluffy and a favorite doll and blanket — but no pets were allowed. I never saw my kitten again — heartbreaking for a child. The FBI took my grandfather in the middle of the night—no explanation he did absolutely nothing wrong. He was very active in the Tacoma Buddhist Church. Grandmother cried for two weeks straight. The FBI forcefully took church leaders, teachers, preachers, and leaders in the community from their homes.”



**A muddy walk between barracks to access facilities such as mess hall and bathrooms at Camp Harmony.**

Elsie added, “All the Seattle Japanese were sent to the Puyallup Fairgrounds; they had special bus transportation. The people of Fife and Puyallup had to find their own way. Often people who took over your farm delivered you in the back of their trucks.”

### **Camp Life**

Cho: “Each room was 20x20 feet with a maximum of six army style cots. For larger families like ours they gave an additional room in another location, [and] families lost communication with each other. A room came with a single light bulb and heater in the center. The roof leaked. Not having enough lumber to finish interior walls left a two-foot section towards the ceiling exposed to the neighboring family’s room [and] you could hear every word... they were nothing but enlarged rabbit hutches.”

Elsie: “Women did the family laundry in tubs with washboards; this was the era of the electric

washing machine with ringers—but not for those at the camp. Hot water would run out as the day progressed, and women with infants were given the head-of-the-line status in the morning.”

Cho: “Drying laundry inside would take days with the damp climate. Mess Hall food was bad. At first we had nothing but military K-rations that were out of date, consisting of food Japanese were not used to—there was much sickness due to the food.”

Elsie: “Families did not eat together... family structure was destroyed after three and half years of detention.”

From the Puyallup Assembly Center, the Japanese were transported on trains, with shades drawn, not knowing where they were going, for a three-day ride to permanent facilities at Minidoka, Idaho.



**Many average Americans turned bitter towards returning Japanese detainees at war's end, such as this Fife barber.**

Comments by Cho and Elsie continued. If you couldn’t attend, a video of the meeting can be borrowed or purchased by contacting Bob Ballou, through our Website, southhillhistory.com.

In closing, moderator Eileen Yamada Lamphere commented, “We don’t want to conclude on a sad note or bitter note; we live in the greatest country in the world—regardless of what happened in the past [and] what is happening now, you still have people around the world who truly want to become Americans!”



# Restoring the old Farmhouse

It started in 1998. Yvonne and Ralph Thorpe could not stand the idea of the charming Lester farmhouse being demolished. "I loved the house, it was everybody's dream house, a classic old farmhouse," recalled Yvonne.

The house stood deteriorating after a developer bought the old 28-acre dairy farm. The Thorpes lived next door and Yvonne recalled her children (they raised six) would get milk walking to the farm with their little wagon. Rose Lester, a friend of the Thorpe's, lived in the house her father built until her death.

Yvonne and Ralph wanted to buy it and learned the abandoned house could be theirs for no cost if they moved it off the property—no small feat. "We were totally insane and jumped on the deal," said Yvonne.

The house was built in 1904, the first house our Society listed on its role of "places of historic interest." Also, Rogers High School student Jeffrey Arnold used the history of the house and its restoration as a senior research project with support by our society in 2005.

There were many challenges to the move. The first was building an access/easement road from 128TH ST E into their five-acre property to the spot where the house would be relocated—after having to clear the timber. Before the house was moved, Yvonne was surprised at all the people that needed to be notified—even the school district! While on its journey down 128TH ST, watched by all the neighbors, progress came to a halt while Comcast dealt with its cable

crossing the road. *The Puyallup Herald* covered the house-moving event.

Once the house was settled into its new surroundings (12702 66TH AV CT E) "the real work started—for Ralph," said Yvonne. Moving a house is considered the same as building a new house—requiring all current building codes to be met. Ralph spent a year using his entire off-job time

making the house livable, "[and] we're still working on it," joked Yvonne. After stripping layers of old wallpaper it was decided the old lath and plaster on the walls would be

retained. Ralph routed all the new wiring and plumbing behind the old 10-inch baseboards; also using the empty chimney space between floors. The Thorpe's lived in a trailer on site and gradually moved into the house as rooms were finished—starting with the bathroom and kitchen.

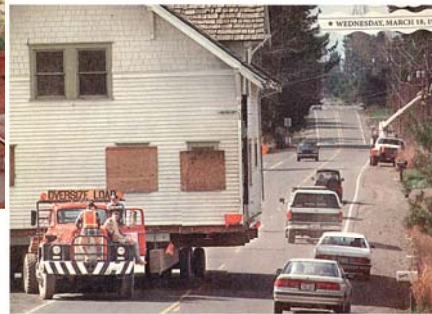
A time capsule was found in the ceiling containing an old farm inventory and liberty bond receipts from World War I.

For our September meeting, Yvonne went through slides describing all the details of moving the house with many interior shots of each room, each with its own particular challenges.

The charming old house now restored and beautifully landscaped has been featured twice in *The Puyallup Herald*. It stands as a treasure to a time past on old South Hill. Thanks to the hard work of the Thorpe's, it's good for another 100-plus years.



**The old Lester farmhouse restored, top. House being moved to Thorpe's property.**



*Images Puyallup Herald*



**Ralph and Yvonne Thorpe with exact replica of their house built by Ralph's brother as a fancy birdhouse.**

# October—A Special Month for South Hill

by Carl Vest

Each year in October a local happening is celebrated by the good people of South Hill. It's one of the most significant events that have ever happened in our community. It was in October 1853, when the area was sparsely settled and generally covered with old growth timber, that a special wagon train crossed South Hill. It was significant because by this passage an emigrant party completed a transcontinental trip, and for the first time used a new route, the North Fork of the Oregon Trail.

In the early 1850s the traditional way of using the Oregon Trail to reach Puget Sound was to first journey across the plains until reaching the Columbia River. When that was accomplished, the trip continued on to what is now the Portland, Oregon, area using that river as a highway. Finally, the last step was to proceed north to Puget Sound on the west side of the mountains, using a combination of river and overland travel. It was a long and arduous journey.

Consequently, it had been argued by local immigration boosters that if the ultimate destination were Puget Sound, a better way to get there would be to take a more direct route when reaching the Columbia River. Starting at about a point now known as Umatilla, Oregon, the central part of Washington Territory could be crossed and the Sound reached through one of the known Cascade Mountain passes. The idea had been extensively promoted and the citizens of Fort Steilacoom had gone so far as to start the construction of a path through Naches Pass on the western slopes of the Cascades. The intent was to follow

an existing ancient Native American hunting trail.

The first emigrant party through Naches Pass actually crossed the plains as two separate groups: one captained by James Longmire and the other by James Biles (sometimes spelled Byles.) They left Council Bluffs, Iowa, in May, 1853. Before heading for Naches Pass they combined into a single train with joint leadership — the so-called Longmire-Biles party. The actual number of people and wagons in this company are really unknown. Recorded numbers vary slightly depending on which historical source is accessed.

However, it is generally accepted that the group had about 36 wagons and 170 people.

The consolidated train left the Columbia River area in early September 1853. It took a month to cross the Cascades. Many published stories exist about the hardships endured during that transit. It's generally accepted that the

party camped and disbanded on October 8, 1853, at Clover Creek, near Spanaway, at the present site of the Brookdale Golf Course. Some historians feel, however, that the date was really October 12, 1853. Whichever date is correct, the train crossed South Hill on that same day.

As for the specific crossing of South Hill, using today's terms, the group left the Puyallup River near the intersection of the Orting Highway and Military Road. They proceeded up the eastern slopes of South Hill (on some of today's 122nd Street), emerging at about the present-day intersection of Military and Shaw Roads. Pierce County has placed a marker on Military Road to recognize this location. It's that brown sign beside the fence of the LDS church playground, on





the south side of Military Road, near the intersection.

The wagon train crossed South Hill moving generally east to west along a ridgeline. Pierce County has placed a second marker at the approximate location where the party crossed present-day 94th Avenue. It's near the new Pierce County Sewer & Traffic complex. At about this location the group turned generally southwest and went through the neighborhood now partially occupied by Rogers High School. Three markers are in place showing this course. First, there is a sign on 128th Street near its intersection with 94th Avenue. Secondly, there is a "manhole" type plate on the Rogers campus, flush with the ground, at the entrance to the Heritage Recreation Center athletic complex. Third, there is an additional signboard on the west of the Rogers property, on 86th Street, showing where the trail/wagon train exited the site.

After crossing present-day 86th Street, the wagon train moved generally southwest. It crossed what would later become known as Starvation Valley and emerged onto what is now Woodland Avenue (Starvation Valley is that dip you go through when you're driving on 160th Street between Woodland Avenue and 78th Street.) Again, county government has placed a notice on Woodland Avenue showing roughly where the immi-

grants came out of the valley and maneuvered to a southerly direction. This placard is on the eastern side of Woodland Avenue, near its intersection with 160th Street.

The wagon train essentially left South Hill in the vicinity of the current Tacoma Gun Club, situated on Canyon Road, about where Canyon Road and Military Road meet. At that point the group turned west, toward Clover Creek. The path would have been along contemporary Military Road. The creek was then followed a short distance to the Mahon Ranch, which is now the Brookdale Golf Course. It was at the ranch where the train was disbanded as an organized entity, the families and individuals each going their own way. There is a marker on the golf course commemorating this point.

Pierce County has designated the path of this wagon train across South Hill as a Heritage Corridor. Unfortunately, most of the original path is gone, the result of settlement, progress and development. One spot does remain, however, and it's near Rogers High School. The segment is on private property and not accessible to the public.

This event in the history of South Hill is significant. It should be recognized as such, and celebrated by all.

## 2018 Hounds on the Hill Event



Left to Right, booth visitor, member Susan Beals, Pat Drake, Suzy Perkinson, Beverley Zook and Wes Perkinson.

Every August the Puyallup South Hill Rotary and Puyallup Parks and Recreation sponsor Hounds on the Hill at Bradley Park. This summer marked the second year South Hill Historical Society has been invited to participate. The 2-mile walk was lined with every imaginable pet related organization and service. Lots of entertainment including live music, a dog costume contest, a sheep dog demonstration and much more. Although our Society's mission isn't pet related the event offers a valuable chance to introduce ourselves to quite a cross-section of our South Hill neighbors (and their pets).

# From the Treasurer

by Ben Peters

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.

## Have Something For The Newsletter?

*We accept anything relating to South Hill history. For example: family history, a current event, an announcement, or old photographs.*

*We're glad to assist with writing or editing.*

*Contact Jerry Bates  
mail@southhillhistory.com*



# Our Current Members

Andy G. Anderson	John & Carrie Loshbough
Andy & Ruth Anderson	Dennis & Debra Massie
Elizabeth Anema	Terry Maves
Marion Armstrong	Laurienne Stewart Minnich
Bob Ballou	Bob Moltke
Jerry Bates	Carolyn Nelson
Susan Beals	Dorothy Nelson
Katherine Bennett	Juanita Nordin
Teresa Best	Ron Pearson
Marilyn Burnett	Wes & Suzy Perkinson
Debbie Burtnett	Ben Peters
Bruce Carpenter	Dr. Jerry Ramsey
Richard Casmier	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	Lori Stock
Mary Glaser	Marge (Crosson) Swain
Calvin Goings	Ralph & Yvonne Thorpe
Paul Hackett	Jade Trevere
Alberta Hagen	Margo L. & Joe Tucci
Evelyn Swalander Hess	Lee Van Pevenage
Wilma Walsworth Hinshaw	Carl Vest
Alan & Linda Hoenhaus	Neil & Celia Vincent
Joe & Rhoda Hoenhaus	Joan Vosler
Maybelle Hoenhaus	Ed Zeiger
Matt Holm	Hans Zeiger
Myrna K. Kucklick	Allan S. & Ellen M. Zulauf
Art & Lorraine Larson	Beverley Zook
Gary Leicht	

## South Hill Historical Society Officers

*President, Yvonne Thorpe*  
*Vice-President, Joe Hoenhaus*  
*Secretary, Susan Beals*  
*Public Relations Coordinator, Beverley Zook*  
*Research Coordinator, Carl Vest*  
*Treasurer, Ben Peters*  
*Newsletter Editor, Webmaster, Jerry Bates*

**Visit our website!**  
**southhillhistory.com**

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

*Copyright 2018*

# South Hill Historical Society Membership/Renewal Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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

---

To: