

Footprints

on the sands of time....

ISSUE XXI

SOUTHWEST SEATTLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 1993



Harbor Avenue in 1916

A RESIDENT of Harbor Avenue starts the arduous process of digging his house out from a devastating slide following the "big snow" of 1916. Life along the busy waterfront street was different than "up on the hill," reports Beach Drive resident and society member Ada Hallberg, whose multi-part series, "Elvida's Eyes," begins this Issue on page 2. We thank Ada for allowing us to print it, along with several marvelous photos.

Fifth annual home tour needs helpers

The fifth annual Tour of Homes holds the promise of being the best ever, but it's coming up sooner than it may seem!

Every year, the tour takes place on the Saturday before Mother's Day, and this year is no different. Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 8.

But that's only about three months from now.

An organizing committee, headed by Vice-President Deb Barker, held the first of its planning sessions on Saturday, Jan. 23.

Volunteers are needed to help secure sites, enlist volunteer hosts and hostesses, publicize the event and take on other tasks.

HOME
WITH
HISTORY

If you can help on this event, which every year draws hundreds of people on a self-guided tour of several of the area's most beautiful and interesting historic structures, call Deb at 935-3592.

The pleasures of
Harbor Avenue through

Elvida's Eyes

[Editor's note: The following is the first in a series of articles on Harbor Avenue that will appear in Footprints this year. An excerpt appeared last month in the West Seattle Herald.]

By ADA HALLBERG

With both hands straining on the handle, 6-year-old Elvida Elingsen held tightly to her suitcase, which was wrapped 'round twice with a rope. It contained all of her possessions and some of her mother's.

Elvida's face was pleasant, and her luminous eyes gave an air of expectancy as she clambered off the paddle-wheel steamer that had just brought her and her ma and pa to Harbor Avenue from downtown Seattle. The year was 1903. Total cost for the three passengers was 15 cents.

Elvida's father, had rented a house for them across the plank road from the ferry landing. He had brought his wife and daughter from their home on Denny Avenue on the north edge of downtown Seattle, to West Seattle where he expected to find a more suitable neighborhood to raise his daughter, and where he could continue his cobbler business. He made shoes to order, and repaired old ones.

The homes and businesses along Harbor Avenue pushed themselves back toward the bluff behind them and were crowded against each other on 30-foot lots. The fronts of many of them were built on stilts to place them above high tides. Frequently it was easier to enter your home by plowing through the mud and sticker bushes behind your house than to get in the front door.

Some of my interviews with Elvida took place when she was in her 70s.

"My God, girl! It was wooded then, all plank streets," she told me. "You had to go over a gangplank affair to get into your house in the front. Sometimes you could get in only through the back, and you might need to lay a plank down in the back, too."



THE SAILING ships Maid of Orleans (left) and Johna are docked next to the ferry West Seattle in this Feb. 10, 1916, view along Harbor Avenue, near today's Don Armeni Park.

Elvida's father made his living as a cobbler, but his avocation as a singer brought him prominence, and Elvida was very proud of this. He was a baritone, she told me, and proudly showed me his picture that was in one of the earliest editions of the community newspaper. His talent was in much demand.

Railroad Avenue was the name of Harbor Avenue in those early days because the trains used to come right along next to the water.

"Cod fish schooners came in from the Bering Sea, and from all over the world boats came," Elvida said, radiating pleasure at the recollection. "There was a cod fish plant right there where the boats docked. They salted the fish and put them in 500-pound barrels.

"Anyhow, they changed the name from Railroad Avenue to Harbor Avenue. The next thing I knew it was Alki Avenue. I didn't like that Alki Avenue name, I'll tell you that. I was glad they changed it back to Harbor Avenue again."

Railroad/Harbor Avenue distinguished her little neighborhood and separated her from that part of Alki she knew was different; it never was a part of the true water-

Continued on page 4

New 1993 Executive Board leads society

Carol Vincent heads the 1993 slate of officers and board members elected by members of our historical society at our annual meeting for 1992.

The Nov. 4 meeting, featuring an entertaining, educational slide show by Seattle historian (and honorary society member) **Paul Dorpat**, drew about 40 to the South Seattle Community College Little Theater.

Carol, a member of the West Seattle Library staff for 20 years and vice-president of our society last year, moves into the president's slot this year.

Active on our society's Save the Admiral Theater Task Force since 1989, Carol last year initiated the popular West Seattle History Discussion Series, an oral history program that is co-sponsored by our society and the library. (See page 4.)

Serving as 1993 vice-president is **Deb Barker**, a planner for the city of Federal Way who has served on the steering committee of the Admiral task force, co-chaired our society's annual home tour in 1992 and moderates the oral history program.

Returning for his fifth year as secretary is **Elliott Couden**, a retired real-estate and insurance broker who founded the society in 1984 and served as its first president for five years.

Also returning, as treasurer for her fourth year, is **Joan Mraz**, art instructor at SSCC.

All four officers are members of our society's Executive Board, and their terms are for one year. The

remaining six 1993 board members (three of whom are new to the board) are as follows:

Clay Eals, a curriculum writer at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and journalism instructor at SSCC, who served as society president from 1989 to 1991. Two years remain on his board term.

Jim Jeffrey, who heads the West Seattle-based firm Investment Management and Research, has been active in the last two home tours. He is a new board member who is filling a three-year term.

Marietta Pane, a retired U.S. Navy training officer, who most recently commanded the NROTC program at the University of Illinois in Champaign. She is a new board member who is filling a two-year term.

Van Peirson, a retired Seattle Post Office carrier, clerk and supervisor, who operates the Post Office Museum in Pioneer Square. One year remains on his board term.

Bob Sumbardo, a motivational speaker who served as our society's president in 1992. He also will assist Elliott in the recording of meeting minutes during 1993. One year remains on his term.

Karen Wissing, a paralegal for King County Medical. With her husband David, she led the successful effort to secure landmark status for Gatewood Elementary School. She is a new board member who is filling a three-year term.

Our society once again has an archivist!

Randy Nelson, reference librarian and photography instructor at South Seattle Community College, agreed last November to assume the volunteer position.

A West Seattle resident since taking the SSCC job in 1980, Randy initially will

serve as the gatekeeper for our society's collection of photographs, newspapers and other artifacts regarding West Seattle and White Center. The artifacts sit in boxes stored in a back room of the SSCC library.

No doubt Randy's role will grow two or three years from now, when the college is scheduled to execute its planned expansion of the library. The expansion is to include the provision of a separate museum-like room for

our society to display and store the artifacts.

Formerly a librarian at Everett Public Library and Whatcom County Library in Bellingham, Randy says local history intrigues him.

"I've always had an interest in Pacific Northwest history," he says. "It's more tangible than other kinds of history. One can see the artifacts from the past — buildings, things like that. Also, as a photography instructor, I'm interested in photo documentation."

Before Randy took on the position, the archivist position remained vacant for the past three years following the departure of **John Ashford** from his position as head librarian at SSCC.

Anyone wishing to donate items to our collection, or to reach Randy for any other reason, should call him at the library, 764-5395.

SSCC Librarian Randy Nelson signs on as society's archivist

Where were the 'Vanished Places'? Library series will let you find out

The West Seattle History Discussion Series keeps moving along at a brisk clip, covering topics of interest to residents new and old.

The series, a topical oral history program videotaped by society president **Carol Vincent** and moderated by **Deb Barker**, vice-president, takes place on the third Wednesday of each month, excluding December and summertime.

The Jan. 20 session focused on "Life Before Safeway," what shopping was like before supermarkets and malls. The topic for the next session, to be held at 7

p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 17, will be "Vanished Places," focusing on Luna Park, Jefferson Elementary School, the Granada Theater and other historic structures that have not survived progress.

Ideas for the topics for future sessions are always welcome. The sessions are held in the children's room at West Seattle Library, 2306 42nd Ave. S.W. People of all ages are invited.

The series is co-sponsored by the library and our historical society. For more information, Carol at 937-6744 (home) or 684-7444 (the library).

Elvida ...

Continued from page 2

front that was hers. Alki Avenue began at Duwamish Head and continued to the Lighthouse where Beach Drive began and where also began the community of South Alki.

The smell of creosote flavored our conversation as we stood on her front porch at 1201 Harbor Ave. S.W.

"The trains came, and that is how we got our fuel and coal and beer and everything. Of course, beer came in horse-drawn beer trucks, too. You see, when we moved there, that's where the saloons were. There were two saloons, and there was a grocery store ... and oh yes, what was the name of that tavern?"

Jubilantly, she remembered.

"The Wheelhouse ... the Wheelhouse!"

I met Elvida when I was a little girl in the 1930s when I went to Alki grammar school with her only child, Betty. I felt her strength and determination even though I was a youngster.

[See part 2 in the next issue.]

Who do you know who would enjoy reading this newsletter?

Do you know of friends or family members who would like to join our society, or who should be a member of our society?

It's simple to sign 'em up. Just give Secretary **Elliott Couden** a call at 932-2290, and he will mail you (or the pertinent person) a membership application that contains all pertinent information.

The dues are easy to remember. To join for one year, you pay just \$10. Corporations pay \$50 a year.

If you wish to avoid the yearly renewal notices, you might consider a life membership. The dues for that category are \$200, the financial equivalent of 20 annual memberships.

Since the society was founded in 1984, a total of 270 individuals and businesses have joined. Well over 200 remain active members today.

What are the reasons for belonging to our society?

The most tangible benefit is the receipt, by mail, of our quarterly newsletter, *Footprints*. The newsletter and other mailings keep you up-to-date on all society activities.

Members also are the focus of an annual picnic each June, an annual membership meeting and program each November, and other special activities.

Perhaps the best reason to join — and renew membership in — our society, however, is to support the various efforts to preserve and enhance the heritage of West Seattle and White Center. A member of our society can be proud, not only of the society's past accomplishments but also of the many projects under way and yet to come.

Later this year, the brochure committee of the Executive Board will complete work on and publish a new, jazzy-looking membership brochure. Be sure to look for it!



PIGEONS PATROL Alki Beach atop the base of the Denny Party landing monument, as drawn by artist Kay Dewar.

Artist spurs brochure for driving tour

Imagine newcomers taking a self-guided driving tour of West Seattle, aided by a colorful brochure featuring artistic renderings of the sites!

A committee of our society's Executive Board is working on just that. Aided by West Seattle artist **Kay Dewar**, the committee is aiming to produce a brochure or booklet useful for residents and visitors alike.

Already, Kay has produced stippled pen-and-ink and colored-pencil drawings of two sites for the tour: the obelisk denoting the Nov. 11, 1851, Denny Party landing at Alki Beach, and the log-cabin Alki Homestead Restaurant. A third and fourth, focusing on the Hainsworth House and Villa Heidelberg bed-and-breakfasts, are under way.

Kay intends to display the original works at a show put on by the West Seattle Cultural Society (now renamed Arts West and merged with West Seattle

Totem Theatre) at its gallery in Jefferson Square in the Junction. The display is tentatively scheduled for July.

Her aim is not only to faithfully capture the sites, but also to add a bit of whimsy. That's reflected in her rendering of the obelisk.

"The pigeons were there when I was there, so I included them in the drawing," she said.

Meanwhile, initial plans for the brochure call for a map that would allow people to guide themselves on a tour of perhaps a dozen of the most historically significant sites in West Seattle. As time goes by, the number of sites (and illustrations) may grow.

The committee is assembling an initial list of sites. Committee members working with Kay on planning and executing the booklet/brochure are **Bob Sumbardo, JoAn Schmitz Fulton** and **Clay Eals**.

Want to join this effort? Call Clay at 935-7515.

Membership survey

Watch your mailbox this spring for a membership information form from our society.

Please don't discard or ignore it. Enclosed will be a postage-paid envelope for you to use in returning the form after you fill it out.

The form will ask you some basic biographical information about yourself, such as your length of residence in West Seattle or White Center (or your connection to those areas), and particular skills and training you may possess.

There are two purposes for collecting such information.

First, the information will allow Executive Board members and others to identify members who might be willing and able to help out with particular society projects.

For instance, someone with a background of library work or similar skills might be well-suited to help catalogue and organize our collection of photos, newspapers and other artifacts.

Or someone with a background in recruiting or public speaking might be willing and able to help work on drumming up more members.

The second purpose is to identify members who may have photographs, newspapers, documents and other artifacts relating to the history of West Seattle and/or White Center.

Our society's collection of artifacts, many of which were relied upon in the preparation of the West Side Story history book in 1987, is never complete. In addition, the benefits of the collection will become much more visible once our society secures a separate display room in an expanded SSCC Library two or three years from now.

Video training

Society President **Carol Vincent**, who initiated the monthly West Seattle History Discussion Series at the West Seattle Library, wants to teach a class in how to operate a video camcorder — and she needs some “students”!

Anyone who suspects that running a video camera is too complicated should think twice, says Carol, who is eager to pass on her skills to others.

She says that she was a novice when she began using

the society's camcorder a year ago, but she quickly caught on to its operation. You can, too, she says.

The class Carol is proposing would be a one-time-only two-hour session, and it would be free of cost.

You can apply the skills that you will learn to the operation of any video camera.

Carol's instruction also is designed to benefit the society, as it is bound to increase the number of people who are able to videotape historical events as they happen.

If you are interested in this class, or have questions about it, please call Carol at 937-6744 (home) or 684-7444 (library/work).

Rainier Valley views

Board member **Van Peirson**, for many years an integral part of the Columbia City Pioneers, is helping to boost the historical profile of the south district of

the city.

Along with South Seattle Community College librarians, Van is planning a display of south-district photographs in the college library, in the Robert Smith (RS) Building.

The college's address is 6000 16th Ave. S.W. The exhibit should go up later this year. Watch for it!

Earl Robinson video

Member **Bette Jean (B.J.) Bullert's** video project, “Earl Robinson: Ballad of an American,” is moving along quite nicely.

Her rough cuts are nearing the final stages, and she is on the way to having folksinger Judy Collins undertake the narration of the hour-long biography of Robinson, the West Seattle-based musician who died July 20, 1991.

B.J. also has finished an application for a National Endowment for the Arts grant to be used for completing the project. For more information, contact her at 932-8973.

Admiral packs 'em in

In the 10 months since the Admiral Theater reopening gala on April 2, 1992, the moviehouse, with its \$1.75-per-movie admission and selection of four to six films each week, has drawn healthy crowds of all ages.

During the summer the Admiral received a new grey-and-red paintjob and added a logo to its marquee. The theater also was the cover story on the 1992-93 West Seattle Neighborhood Telephone Directory.

The management of the Admiral, which was the focus

Catching Up A Digest

BLACK
and **WHITE**

Words by
DAVID ARKIN

Music by
EARL ROBINSON

(S.S.A.)

ARRANGED BY
JOHN COATES, JR.

FOR TREBLE VOICES
(B-373) 35 CENTS

Shawnee Press inc. / DELAWARE WATER GAP, PA. 18327

THIS IS the cover of eight pages of vocal/piano sheet music donated to our society last November by Charles Payton, who coordinates historic preservation efforts for King County. The song "Black and White," written to celebrate the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision striking down school segregation, was made popular 20 years later by the rock group Three Dog Night.

of an intensive preservation effort by our historical society since its closure in 1989, has asked our society to supply a plaque or framed description of the historical features of the building, and our Executive Board recently agreed to do so.

The board also is maintaining, in a separate Admiral Theater Restoration Fund, \$760 to be granted to the owners and management of the moviehouse when they undertake further restoration to the building's historical features, such as the interior auditorium murals and the mast and crow's nest outside.

The money was donated by Admiral supporters on reopening night and afterward.

Publication notes

West Seattle native **Emmett Watson**, an honorary member of our society who has derived his fame from his columns in the two Seattle daily newspapers, published his second book, Once Upon a Time in Seattle, last fall.

He was the subject of a feature in the Dec. 2, 1992, West Seattle Herald.

In his own Seattle Times column, Watson profiled **Art Wolfe**, the famous West Seattle-based nature photographer, on Jan. 10.

The historical Seattle waterfront photo appearing in honorary member **Paul Dorpat's** "Now and Then" column in the Seattle Times' Pacific Magazine on Jan. 17 featured the City of Seattle, the first ferry on Puget Sound, which operated between West Seattle and downtown Seattle for several decades starting Dec. 24, 1888.

Last but not least, a new newspaper has sprung up to serve the Admiral District and surrounding neighborhoods (such as Alki, Harbor Avenue and northern Beach Drive).

It's called the Admiral Bridge, a monthly tabloid with a press run of 10,000 copies. The December 1992 issue was the second edition.

For more information on the Bridge, call 286-5307.

Naming that place

Where is Tin Can Park, and how did it get that informal monicker? Seattle researcher **Tom Weiler** can tell you. (Hint: It's in West Seattle's Admiral District.)

For the last few years, Tom, a Northgate-area resident, has been compiling information on Seattle-area place names for a book that he hopes to publish in the next year.

A former journalist, public-relations writer and teacher, Tom also delivers speeches on the 700 to 1,000 place names he already has delved into.

Some names he has no background on yet. For instance, in West Seattle, he's searching out the origin of streets with names such as Halleck, Hobart, Tillman, Beveridge and Wilton.

If you can help Tom with those names, or know of other local place names that shouldn't be left out of his book, write him at P.O. Box 31291, Seattle, WA 98103, or give him a call at 547-8946.

Women's heritage

There's Emma Schmitz Viewpoint. Louisa Boren had a lot to do with the Denny Party landing and settle-

Continued on page 8

Catching Up A Digest

Continued from page 7

ment. And Jeanette Williams played a key role in construction of the high-level West Seattle Bridge.

But how about other buildings, parks and other landmarks where women have contributed significantly?

With the aid of a grant from the King County Cultural Resources Division, University District resident **Mildred Andrews** is writing a guidebook on women's heritage in the county. She plans to publish it later this year.

This first-of-its-kind guidebook will profile about 150 sites. Mildred is seeking examples of women from different ethnical, age, social, religious, professional and economic groups.

Anyone with ideas for her should call her at 524-1426 as soon as possible.

PNW Historians

Longacres, Boeing and honorary member **Paul Dorpat's** "Seattle Chronicle" — what a combination!

The Pacific Northwest Historians Guild is presenting a conference on those topics March 5 and 6.

The first afternoon, slated for the University of Washington's Suzzallo Library, presentations and comments on Dorpat's video and "Longacres: The Miracle Strip," by Steven Sadis, will be the focus.

The next day, at Boeing's Museum of Flight, five speakers will examine the airplane company's impact on Seattle's growth, followed by a tour of the museum.

Admission to the conference is \$10, plus fees for meals. For more information, call **Mary Wright** at 781-9511.

President's Award

Bob Sumbardo, presiding at our society's annual meeting on Nov. 4, gave a President's Award to **Clay Eals**, board member. The accompanying plaque says the award is given "in appreciation of service over and above the call of duty" to the society.

Clay's major society project for the foreseeable future is to complete an index for the West Side Story history book, published in 1987.

Got the write stuff?

Did you enjoy **Ada Hallberg's** article in this issue of Footprints? Great!

Footprints encourages submissions from anyone on topics relating to the history of our area. If you're interested in having something of yours printed in Footprints, please call 935-7515. Your effort will be much appreciated!

FOOTPRINTS

(Editor: Clay Eals)

Newsletter of the Southwest Seattle Historical Society
c/o South Seattle Community College
6000 16th Ave. S.W., Seattle, WA 98106

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SEATTLE, WA
PERMIT NO. 4960