COLUMBIA
THE MAGAZINE OF NORTHWEST HISTORY • SPRING 2018

COVER STORY
Tacoma’s Lincoln High School
In 1938, the choir was Off To St. Louis!

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Welcome to the Spring 2018 issue of COLUMBIA. My name is Feliks Banel, and I’m very excited to be the new editor of this esteemed publication. I’m also incredibly honored to be attempting to fill the Evergreen State-sized shoes of longtime editor Christina Dubois. Christina retired in December after 30 years of service to the Washington State Historical Society and COLUMBIA readers everywhere, and we wish her all the best.

I come to COLUMBIA with 25 years of experience working in history, historic preservation and broadcast journalism in the Pacific Northwest. It was interest in an unsolved murder in the Rose Hill neighborhood of Kirkland where I grew up that first inspired me to research and write about local history back when I was a teenager. In my early 20s, leading a grassroots campaign to try and preserve an old school house further opened my eyes to the world of archives, museums and public agencies that make up our heritage community. In my professional career, I served as deputy director of Seattle’s Museum of History & Industry (MOHAI) for nearly a decade. For almost 20 years, I’ve produced radio and TV programs about Northwest history for KUOW, KIRO Radio, KCTS and the Seattle Channel.

With this issue, COLUMBIA devotees will notice some changes to the look of the magazine, and some new columns and other elements that may become regular features. Everyone who works on COLUMBIA cares deeply about Washington state and Northwest history. We are eager to maintain the best traditions of COLUMBIA to share thoughtful, well-researched and distinctive stories, along with accurate and relevant information about history related programs and activities, with people all across the region.

And we always love to hear from you with your thoughts on COLUMBIA, your questions and comments, and especially your ideas for stories. Please send email to editor.columbia@gmail.com.

STEWANIE MARTIN
Contributor to Noteworthy
Stephanie Martin is a park ranger for the National Park Service at Whitman Mission National Historical Site west of Walla Walla.

C. MARK SMITH
is well known to COLUMBIA readers for his award-winning 2010 article about Senator Harry P. Cain. Smith spent 40 years managing economic development organizations at the federal, state and local level. In this issue, he examines the life and career of Samuel Volpentest, who did much to shape Hanford and the Tri-Cities.

STEPHANIE MARTIN
Contributor to Noteworthy
Stephanie Martin is a park ranger for the National Park Service at Whitman Mission National Historical Site west of Walla Walla.

ED NOLAN
Head of Special Collections
Ed Nolan is photo and ephemera curator for the Washington State Historical Society.

KIM DAVENPORT & RAFAEL SAUCEDO
KIM DAVENPORT & RAFAEL SAUCEDO collaborated on the cover story about a cross-country trip by Tacoma musicians 80 years ago. Davenport is a musician herself, and is a lecturer in music at the University of Washington Tacoma. She is also director of the Tacoma Historical Society. Rafael Saucedo is completing his undergraduate work in healthcare leadership at the University of Washington Tacoma. He plans to pursue a graduate degree in community planning.

PETER DONAHUE
is the author of the historical novels Madison House and Clara and Merritt, both set in Seattle, and Three Sides Water, a new trilogy of short novels set on the Olympic Peninsula during different historical periods. He has written about Northwest literature and authors for COLUMBIA since 2005.
PLAYDATE WITH A SLINKY DOG

It’s well known that the Pacific Northwest is a leader when it comes to innovations in aviation, technology, coffee and retail.

But did you know that we can also claim the venerable Slinky Dog as one of our own?

“The Slinky Dog was made by a Seattle area housewife, Helen Malsed,” said Washington State History Museum lead curator Gwen Whiting. “Helen’s young son received a Slinky one year for Christmas. As he was playing with it, he asked his parents, ‘What would this Slinky be like if it had wheels?’”

Necessity may be the mother of invention, but Helen Malsed was the mother of Fredrick. And Fredrick’s question gave his clever mom an idea.

“She talked her husband into helping her basically make a prototype,” Whiting said, by “taking apart a toy and attaching a Slinky to the middle of it, with wheels on the bottom so that the Slinky would expand and contract.”

The Malseds sent a letter to Slinky manufacturer James Industries explaining what they’d come up with, and the rest, as they say, is American toy history.

A giant Slinky Dog mural figures prominently in TOYTOPIA, a blockbuster traveling exhibit at the Washington State History Museum on view through June 10. This local-toy-makes-good is also part of an accompanying exhibition called PlayDates that highlights more than a century of toys and games from the Washington State Historical Society’s collection.

As for Helen Malsed, Gwen Whiting says that a plastic canine with a spring for a body was only the beginning for this local inventor, who went on to create more than 25 other toys and games.

“One of the most famous things that she invented was the Snap-Lock beads by Fisher Price, those giant colorful beads that toddlers and infants still play with today,” Whiting said.

Helen Malsed passed away in Seattle in 1998 at age 88. It’s unclear how old that would have made her in Slinky Dog years.

See Washington native Slinky Dog in TOYTOPIA through June 10; Collections Selections features this turn-of-the-century day nursery recreation; and don’t miss your chance to play music on the giant keyboard as seen in the movie BIG.

(Courtesy of Washington State History Museum)
Music, Daffodils, and the City of Destiny

BY KIM DAVENPORT & RAFAEL SAUCEDO

In 1938, Lincoln High School’s a cappella choir was invited to compete in a national music festival in St. Louis. In addition to the school’s fundraising efforts, hundreds of Tacoma citizens, businesses, and social organizations collaborated to raise money for the trip. In an economy still emerging from the Great Depression, the community was able to collect nearly $5,000 in just over three months—about $83,000 in today’s economy—to make the journey possible.

The dramatic train ride of 6,000 miles over 10 days gave 60 students from working-class families, most of whom had never traveled outside of the state, the opportunity to shine a light on the outstanding music program at Lincoln High School. It also allowed Tacoma to share “greetings and good wishes” with civic and business leaders in cities throughout the western United States. At each stop along the way, the students sang and gave away thousands of Puyallup Valley daffodils.

From Lincoln High School’s opening in 1914 until 1958, there were just two high schools in Tacoma: Stadium High School and Lincoln. In the early decades of the 20th century, music in Tacoma’s schools typically consisted of a band, an orchestra, and glee clubs. A highlight of the year for both of Tacoma’s high schools was the performance of an operetta or musical. The selection was typically either a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera or a recent Broadway show, in large part because the early leaders of music education in Tacoma’s schools were imported from England and the East Coast.

Margaret Rawson Goheen joined the Lincoln teaching staff in 1928. She was hired to direct the orchestra, but from the moment she arrived, Goheen worked to expand Lincoln’s music department with a focus on choral music, which she viewed as the most effective means to reach the largest number of students. She had earned her undergraduate degree and teaching certificate from Washington State College (now Washington State University) in 1924, and arrived at Lincoln after teaching a few years at Sumner High School.

In 1929, Lincoln’s student-founded glee club had 35 members; by 1930, it had doubled to 70. By 1932, enough students were involved in choral activities that a performance of Handel’s Messiah was added to an annual schedule that already included the production of an operetta. In 1935, Goheen
formed an elite a cappella choir of 70 students selected from the ever-growing glee club membership. Within just a few years, this choir became nationally recognized and the success of the music program at Lincoln justified hiring additional teachers.

Goheen’s 1938 thesis for her graduate degree in music reveals a broad vision for the program she was building at Lincoln, making the case that it should be a model high school music curriculum. Her survey of peers around the country confirmed what she had observed in her early years at Lincoln: only a small percentage of students had the opportunity to sing in an elite choir or play in an orchestra. Goheen made clear on the first page of her thesis that she thought this insufficient, stating, “If music is to render its fullest contribution in education, it should be made available to all students.” She went on to quote fellow music educator John A. Sexton:

> It should create a society, a generation, in which there are music lovers—men and women who have experienced music, and who love it, because it is a part of their experience and, therefore, a language which they not only hear, but a language which they speak as well.

Goheen proposed that high school music departments include the usual instrumental and choral ensembles and also offer courses in music history, theory, and appreciation. Her aim was to reach students who had already demonstrated musical talent and interest as well as the “large majority of the student body who either have not had the opportunity to participate in musical activities or have not had sufficient interest to enjoy that phase of education.” With this in mind, Goheen and her colleagues added several music courses to Lincoln’s curriculum, making them prerequisites for students seeking to participate in the choir or orchestra, and also offering them as electives to any student in the school. Through these courses, hundreds of students attended concerts, listened to an assigned repertoire utilizing recordings and radio broadcasts, explored music history, and learned the rudiments of music theory.
Goheen was also a proponent of choral singing as a means of bringing communities together, both in school and in the city at large as alumni made their way into adulthood. As a model for what was possible, she cited the example of the network of community choirs in the Detroit and Flint, Michigan region that had built up around the auto industry. In an environment where Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors competed over which company had the best employee choir, high school choirs and alumni ensembles flourished in the region. Her thesis also mentioned the impact of the Federal Music Project, a New Deal program that supported professional and amateur musical activities around the country.

After providing this national context, Goheen described the alumni/community choir then taking shape under her guidance. The group, Tacoma Symphonic Choir, formed in October 1937 with 28 members and first performed at Lincoln in January 1938. By the time she completed her thesis, Goheen noted that 65 applications had already been received for the fall 1938 choir, primarily from recent Lincoln alumni. She confidently stated:

As these young people develop into adults and the adult choir absorbs the students who graduate each year, we shall have reason to think that a music program in the high school has been planned in which music will function permanently in leisure time.

Goheen spent the remainder of her career at Lincoln, retiring in 1955. After earning her graduate degree in 1939, she continued to seek out professional development opportunities, traveling around the country to complete additional graduate coursework and participate in workshops with choral visionaries of the day, including Robert Shaw and Fred Waring. In addition to the typical schedule of performances at the school, Lincoln's choirs appeared regularly in the community, on local radio, and in regional and national competitions.

In Spring 1941, Goheen gave her approval for a group of ambitious students to write and produce an original musical, Of Men and Models, to take the place of the usual spring operetta. The following November, the choir accompanied the great American bass baritone Paul Robeson during his first Tacoma performance (see page 12). Throughout the war years, Lincoln's choirs sang for wounded soldiers in local military hospitals and for both white and black soldiers at each of the still-segregated USO posts in downtown Tacoma. By the early 1950s, Lincoln students were regularly performing music more typically done by professionals than high school ensembles. In a career spanning nearly 30 years at Lincoln High School, Goheen consistently challenged her students with an ambitious repertoire and the highest standards of excellence. Thousands of students were impacted by her teaching.

Tacomans took pride in the success of Goheen's music program. Local churches and businesses featured the Lincoln choirs. In December 1940, after one such performance at Rhodes Brothers, a downtown department store, Goheen received a letter from the store manager that said, “We want you to know that we greatly enjoyed having the Lincoln a cappella choir with us to sing for our customers during the Christmas season.”

Lincoln's choirs frequently participated in such regional events as the Northwest Music Educators (NWME) Conference, performing alongside and earning the respect of their counterparts from the University of Washington, Pacific Lutheran College, and College of Puget Sound (now Pacific Lutheran University and University of Puget Sound, respectively). Following the 1937 NWME conference, during which a select Lincoln choir participated in a live radio broadcast, UW band and orchestra director Walter Welke sent Goheen a letter of appreciation, noting: “The quality of the group was particularly noteworthy in their depth of tone. The fact that you exercise perfect control over them was evidenced in their response to your every direction.”
Lincoln alumni who participated in Goheen’s choral program during these years attest to her high standards and the energy she devoted to her students. Marguerite Johnson Owens, who joined the choir in 1939, recalls that Goheen encouraged students to practice together in small ensembles such as quartets or sextets. When these ad hoc groupings were particularly successful, Goheen encouraged them to perform publicly. Owens was a member of the Floradora Sextet, which, after some initial support from Goheen, went on to become a self-governing group that performed around the area. Reflecting on the support and encouragement she received from her teacher, Owens recalls that she “did not compliment people often, but it was quite an honor when she did!”

Lee Hale, a member of the class of 1941 who went on to a career in show business following his musical start at Lincoln, has fond memories of his experiences in Goheen’s choirs. Although Hale remembers Goheen as “immensely formidable,” he also has fond memories of the support and encouragement she gave him when he proposed the idea of the student-produced musical, Of Men and Models. He also has distinct memories of his first day in the Lincoln choir:

Margaret Goheen was kind and friendly to her new students on my first day in her choir class. And then we got right down to business—reading some of her choral arrangements, which were always far-out in my inquisitive mind. That first sophomore year was more than I had hoped for. This was the real thing. I was going to be a part of Mrs. Goheen’s award-winning a cappella choir!

By the 1937–38 academic year, Goheen’s work with her students was garnering attention nationally. In January 1938, school officials received word that Lincoln’s a cappella choir was invited to participate in the Music Educator’s National Conference in St. Louis. National music festivals aimed at celebrating the work of high school music programs had begun in the 1920s, and yet it was not until the late 1930s that such festivals actually included representation from across the country. In the 1938 festival in St. Louis, Lincoln was the sole invitee from Washington. While the invitation was a source of civic pride, it also presented a challenge, which was reflected in newspaper headlines: “What is Tacoma Going To Do About ‘Abe’ Singers?” and “Problem Put Up to Tacoma.”

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The elite a cappella choir members were the sons and daughters of carpenters, dressmakers, garbage truck drivers, auto mechanics, machinists, and store clerks.

One article in particular summed up the financial reality of such a trip for Lincoln families in an economy still reeling from the Great Depression, and then posed a challenge to Tacoma's citizens and business community:

So far it's just a good story. Obviously, it will cost something to send 60 singers with their conductor, accompanists and chaperones to St. Louis. Just as obviously, it is unlikely that the parents of the singers can afford the expense. That makes it a community proposition. Once upon a time Tacoma would not permit the word 'if' to enter into such a proposition. When funds were needed to send Troop B to a world's fair or send a band to participate in some outstanding activity, a few hours' solicitation among the businessmen would raise the money. Tacoma then was known as the "I Will" city of the Pacific coast, as Chicago was of the Middle West.

Many Lincoln families would not have had the means to fund their student's portion of the trip expenses. There were no doctors, lawyers, or bankers among the parents of the Lincoln choir members. The elite a cappella choir members were the sons and daughters of carpenters, dressmakers, garbage truck drivers, auto mechanics, machinists, and store clerks. Sending the entire 60-member choir on such a long journey would certainly require a community investment.

During February and March 1938, alongside reports of fundraising activities for the Lincoln choir, there was news of a flood leaving 10,000 homeless in Los Angeles, 22 killed in a Midwest tornado, and many chilling stories documenting Hitler's growing military ambitions across Europe.

These disturbing distractions did not dampen the community's excitement surrounding the opportunity presented to the students from Lincoln. In just a few months, through countless individual donations, community-supported fundraisers, and benefit concerts, the community managed to raise nearly $5,000 to fund the grand expedition to St. Louis.

Fundraising took place on two fronts: choir members themselves raised money from fellow students, family, and friends; and the Lincoln PTA asked the Young Men's Business Club (YMBC) to coordinate fundraising efforts within their network of businesses and social organizations throughout the city.

Lincoln students were quick to strategize ways in which they could gather as much money as possible. Choir members divided themselves into four self-named groups—the St. Louis Railsplitters, the St. Louis-or-Busters, the St. Louis Hustlers, and the St. Louis Go-Getters—and competed to see who could raise the most. At the height of the fundraising efforts, the hallway inside Lincoln's main entrance was occupied by four large bulletin boards on wheels, one for each team, with musical notes representing every ten dollars raised.

With strong efforts by the Lincoln students themselves being reported in local papers, others soon joined in. Lincoln's cross-town rival, Stadium High School, hosted three band concerts with a 50-cent admission fee and donated all proceeds to...
Lincoln’s a cappella choir. Also, the Stadium student council voted to donate $25 from their music fund to the cause. As Stadium’s principal, E. E. Perkins, stated in a newspaper interview, “This should not be considered purely a problem for Lincoln, but as a civic project of interest to the city as a whole.”

The Tacoma Council of Service Clubs sent out a call for assistance to its member organizations. Clubs began to form funding committees to help spread awareness of the campaign. The Tacoma Sportsmen’s Club raised $25, the Tacoma Japanese Association raised $25, the Constitutional League of Women raised $10, the Women’s Breakfast Club raised $10, and a Rotary Club chapter raised $57. These are just a few examples of the dozens of organizations that contributed; business owners, unions, social and community groups, and churches from around the city pitched in.

Upon reaching $3,500, the campaign’s initial goal, Lincoln students and the Tacoma community encountered an unexpected dilemma. Since fundraising efforts had begun, railroad costs had increased by $350; suddenly, $4,000 became the new goal. Within a week, three major events were organized to help meet the new target.

First was a film night at the Lakewood Community Center, hosted by the YMBC. Then, Lincoln’s Alumni Association hosted a formal ball in the Masonic Temple’s Fellowship Hall. The final event took place at the Lincoln High School Bowl in the form of a pre-season Tacoma City League baseball game. The Weisfield/Goldberg and Superior Diary teams—the teams that had faced each other for the city title the previous year—competed, and all proceeds went to the “On to St. Louis” fund. “The City League is only too glad to take its part,” declared Roy Archer, president of Tacoma’s amateur baseball association.

Thanks to this strong final push, more than enough money was added to the coffers. When all of the donations were tallied, nearly $5,000 had been raised. With this largesse, and with favors being called in around the country, the Lincoln delegation would be treated to a truly grand journey. Few people in Tacoma could have been unaware of the campaign. Some earned an orange tag printed with “Lincoln Choir to St. Louis—I Have Done My (Two Bits).” Others attended an event or simply read about the fundraising project in the daily papers. The entire community was invited to see the students off on the day of their departure—Saturday, March 26. An estimated 3,000 people crowded Union Station on Pacific Avenue to say farewell and good luck as the Lincoln choir began the journey to St. Louis.

Newspaper accounts of the send-off left little doubt that it was a major event:

Not since 1918, when the first victorious American troops returned to Tacoma from France, has a crowd jammed the Union Station such as that which Saturday night bid “bon voyage” to the Lincoln high school a cappella choir on its departure for the national music festival at St. Louis.

Those present were the first to see the banner that hung from the train: “Lincoln High School 60 Voices a cappella Extend Greetings and Good Wishes from Tacoma, Washington, America’s Evergreen Playground.”
Mayor George Smitley, left, and Mayor-elect John Siegel, right, were on hand for the choir’s send-off to St. Louis. Daffodil Festival Attendant Bernice Daniel of Lincoln High School held a bouquet of daffodils, a few of the 10,000 blossoms being borne by the choir to advertise our area’s Daffodil Festival. Wearing the bright yellow daffodil lei was choir manager Milton Evans, who also served as chairman of the “On to St. Louis” organization that raised the funds for the choir to participate. (Tacoma Public Library Digital Collection, D7142-1A)

A participant pin from the 1938 MENC conference in St. Louis. (Tacoma Historical Society, 2017.121.001)

Right: Students pose on the road as they travel to St. Louis by train. (Tacoma Public Library, MS-088 Margaret Rawson Goheen Arneson Papers)

With the entire community so invested in the success of the endeavor, it’s hardly surprising that the journey took on added dimensions. Besides competing in the music festival itself, the students were charged with representing their city across a large swath of the country—14 states in all. Tacoma Mayor J.C. Siegle and Washington Governor Clarence D. Martin wrote letters of introduction to their respective counterparts in each of the planned stops. Through business and personal connections, the journey had grown in scope beyond simply taking the most direct train route to and from St. Louis. The students were to cover 6,000 miles in 10 days, visiting major cities in the Midwest, Texas, and California, as well as a number of smaller towns.

The timing of the trip—the last week of March and first week of April—provided Tacoma boosters the opportunity to show off the region in colorful fashion. With Puyallup Valley daffodils at the peak of their season, the Lincoln students would be tasked with sharing the blooms with everyone they met along the way. The train that departed from Union Station carried tens of thousands of daffodils. Another batch of flowers was sent on a separate train to meet the students when they arrived in California on their return journey.

Their route took them east through Washington, Idaho, Montana, and North Dakota. There were no major stops the first day, but stops in small towns along the way provided many opportunities for the excited Lincoln students to sing from the train. Some of them had never been outside the Tacoma-Seattle area or traveled overnight on a train. Only a few had ever been out of Washington. Once it reached St. Paul, the train turned south, passing through Milwaukee, and reaching the group’s first major destination, Chicago, on Wednesday, March 30, at 9:00 in the morning. They toured the city aboard a double-decker bus and had the opportunity to visit the zoo just before their departure. By 11:40 a.m., they were back on the train.

The next day, they arrived in St. Louis and checked into the Hotel York. In a letter home on hotel stationery, Oscar Rambeck, a junior, described some of the excitement the group experienced on the first day in St. Louis, before competing in the festival itself:

We had our pictures taken and had a newsreel taken. The newsreel is going to come to Tacoma. After the newsreel was taken we talked to the mayor of St. Louis, and he showed us around the city hall.
said that he was going to arrange a party for us at the zoo. They say that St. Louis has about the best zoo in the United States.

Between rehearsals and meetings with dignitaries, the students somehow found time to distribute an enormous number of daffodils, which quickly made the news:

St. Louis is finding out that Tacoma is the daffodil center of the world since members of the Lincoln high school a cappella choir, 61 strong, descended on that city, Associated Press dispatches revealed Thursday morning. The Tacoma singers distributed 10,000 daffodils to the St. Louis officials and residents. They made a great hit.

The Lincoln choir was one of just a handful of participating groups invited to perform on national radio during the festival. The students from Tacoma were scheduled to sing live from the festival for 15 minutes on Friday, April 1. Lincoln was scheduled to sing at 2:15 p.m. Pacific Time, and hundreds of supporters in Tacoma gathered around their radios for the performance. In 1938, when television was still in its infancy, it was radio that was a staple in every home; performing on a live national radio broadcast was a rare honor for a high school choir.

Lincoln placed an impressive fifth out of dozens of competing choirs in St. Louis and received high scores in all categories. After the competition the choir began the return journey, this time taking the long way home. The first stop was Topeka, Kansas, where they arrived on the morning of Saturday, April 2. They distributed more daffodils and were greeted warmly by the governor of Kansas. The next stop was in El Paso, Texas, on the border with Mexico. There the choir was welcomed by local officials and given an opportunity to sing in a 15-minute local radio broadcast.

Their route also took them through Los Angeles and San Francisco. According to Tacoma newspapers, these visits were primarily dedicated to sightseeing. Visiting the Golden Gate Bridge, completed in May 1937, turned out to be one of the activities students remembered best.

After a long, exciting, and successful journey, the group arrived home on Wednesday, April 6. Families, friends, and supporters—making up a crowd estimated at 2,000—waited eagerly at Tacoma’s Union Station to greet the “touring songsters.” The train was three hours late, due to a derailed freight train in Oregon, but the greeting was no less enthusiastic. Local papers, in their account of the group’s return, summed up the importance of the trip:

Among those who had time and opportunity to talk seriously of the trip, the immense advertising value to Tacoma of sending the big choir on the 6,000-mile trip was the principal theme. Wherever the choir stopped, and they made many stops on the long trek around half the nation, people were almost incredulous that a city would chip in enough money to make such a trip possible. And the choir itself, singing impromptu on railway station platforms, from tops of buses, in auditoriums and over the air, made the finest kind of an impression, which was accentuated by the thousands of daffodils distributed along the way.

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PAUL ROBESON
Plays Tacoma with Lincoln High School’s a Cappella Choir

On November 19, 1941, the multi-talented Paul Robeson made his first concert appearance in Tacoma. Although it was his powerful baritone voice that was featured in this event, Robeson was famous for a wide variety of talents. In 1915, as the third African-American student to be admitted to Rutgers University, he was recognized during his time there as a football All-American, a fine stage actor, and a singer; and he was elected class valedictorian upon his graduation in 1919.

Robeson went on to complete his law degree at Columbia University in 1923. The absence of opportunities for black lawyers at that time led him to pursue a career in theater and on the concert stage. He received acclaim for everything from his performances of Shakespeare in London and New York to his recitals featuring African-American spirituals. As he grew older, Robeson became increasingly involved in political and civil rights issues, both in the United States and abroad. His impact as an activist was not fully recognized until after his death in 1976.

The event that brought Robeson to Tacoma for the first time was the premiere concert of the Temple Theatre’s 1941–42 All-Star Series, which featured Robeson alongside Clara Rockmore, a virtuoso theremin player. The program included Ballad for Americans, a patriotic cantata written in 1939 for the Federal Theater Project. Robeson made the work famous through live radio broadcasts and a best-selling 1940 recording, and went on to perform the popular work frequently on radio and in concert venues around the country during the war years. The lyrics, written by John La Touche, take the listener through major events in American history, painting an inclusive picture with many references to the diversity of the American population. Earl Robinson, an alumnus of the University of Washington, composed the music.

The Lincoln High School a cappella choir was chosen to provide accompaniment for the famous artist. A high school choir would not typically have accompanied Robeson, but as the concert manager stated when announcing the event, Few cities can boast of a finer high school choral group than can Tacoma with its outstanding Lincoln choir. Having the choir under Mrs. Goheen’s most capable direction sing the Ballad for Americans with Paul Robeson should certainly provide a great thrill for all lovers of fine music.

The girls in the choir contributed toward the purchase of 180 yards of pink taffeta and patterns for new formal dresses to be worn during the concert and made their own dresses at school under the supervision of Lincoln sewing instructor Edith Ramsey. Especially talented Lincoln choir alumni still living in the Tacoma area were invited back to participate in the event.

The choir received the sheet music just a few weeks before the performance, and Goheen drilled her students repeatedly to ensure perfection. Some of the rehearsals included singing along with Robeson’s recordings. Alumni who remembered the event 75 years later recalled those intense rehearsals, as well as the pride they felt when they had the opportunity to meet Paul Robeson, who was generous in his praise of their work:

Among all the choirs who have helped with this piece, including some of the fine college choirs, this is the easiest group with which I have ever sung. Those boys and girls and the conductor know what it’s all about.

Reflecting on the concert in a letter of thanks to Goheen, Temple Theatre concert manager W. F. Tibbits was clearly delighted:

Few concert events in recent years have been more warmly received by our patrons than the concert last Wednesday night. No small part of the success of the evening was the work of the Lincoln Choir in performing the Ballad for Americans with Mr. Robeson. I would like to thank each member of the choir personally for turning in such a splendid performance. Many concert patrons heard the choir for the first time. There were many people from out of town and the fine work of the choir was not only a credit to you, the members of the choir and Lincoln High School, but was a credit to Tacoma.
UNDENIABLY NORTHWEST READS

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Rodney Frey, Foreword by Leonard Bends
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SAM VOLPENTEST

Godfather of the Tri-Cities

Seattle transplant Sam Volpentest had invested everything he owned in his Tri-Cities taverns when the federal government announced in 1964 that they were going to shut down the plutonium reactors at Hanford. Still recovering from life-threatening cancer, he vowed to save both his businesses and his adopted community. Along the way, he became the “Godfather” of the Tri-Cities.

BY C. MARK SMITH

Sam Volpentest fell into the role of community leader through luck and circumstance. Leveraging the political contacts and sales skills he developed over many years, he became a legendary lobbyist and community “fixer” who helped shape the history of the Hanford Site and the Tri-Cities. Neither existed when he was born to poor Italian immigrant parents in Seattle on September 24, 1904. Ambitious and street-smart, young Volpentest was a small man with big dreams. He went to work at the age of 10 to help support his family but found enough time to become one of Seattle’s first Eagle Scouts in 1921. Always interested in music, he founded one of Seattle’s original radio dance bands while still attending Broadway High School.

Volpentest began full-time work at age 17, first as a clerk and then as a star salesman for the pioneer Seattle wholesale grocer Schwabacher Bros. & Company, selling canned goods and produce in downtown Seattle to restaurants, speakeasies, and small corner grocery stores. He worked that delivery route for 22 years, honing his sales skills and developing a wide range of personal contacts, not only surviving but prospering through the 1920s, the Great Depression, and the years leading up to World War II.

Volpentest idolized his favorite uncle, a cigar-smoking, smalltime bootlegger, gambler, and club manager who was well-known in Seattle’s private club and after-hours scene. At one point his uncle managed the Italian Club, a favored downtown hangout for leaders of Seattle’s small Italian community. It offered fine dining and a convivial bar that attracted many of the city’s aspiring politicians, including Albert Rosellini, who became governor in 1956, and Warren G. Magnuson, who after being elected to the U.S. Senate in 1944, went on to serve six terms, chairing both the Senate Commerce and Senate Appropriations Committees. Volpentest never forgot Magnuson’s admonition that “the closest path to a politician is through your own wallet.”

In 1942 Volpentest, at age 38, left Schwabacher. It had become obvious that he would never break into the family-owned company’s top management. He worked for a few other companies during and immediately after the war, but he came to the conclusion that if he wanted to provide his children with the college education he had missed, he would have to go to work for himself. The opportunity arrived in summer 1949 when he responded to a blind ad in The Seattle Times seeking potential business owners willing to locate in a new strip mall the army was building in Richland, the administrative headquarters for the Hanford Engineer Works, the production facilities for atomic bomb development that were part of the top-secret World War II-era Manhattan Project.
Volpentest wanted to open the mall’s new grocery store but had to settle for a tavern when he was told the grocery store was no longer available. However, the weather was hot, the workers were thirsty, and he was a good listener—his tavern prospered, and he soon bought several more. He realized, though, that Richland would never reach its potential as long as it was owned and operated by the federal government. He became active in local efforts to incorporate Richland and lobby the government to sell the land and buildings to residents.

Volpentest was a lifelong Democrat and a member of that broad, national coalition that elected Franklin D. Roosevelt to four terms as president. Beginning in the mid-1950s, he became an active fundraiser for Warren Magnuson and Albert Rosellini, as well as Henry M. Jackson, Washington’s junior senator who was elected in 1953. All three took a strong interest in Hanford issues and helped Richland achieve incorporation in 1958. They became Volpentest’s close friends and political allies.

It was about that time that Volpentest first noticed a soreness in his jaw. The doctor’s diagnosis was devastating. The 53-year-old had a rare form of cancer of the jaw; the doctor said he had perhaps less than a month to live. To fight the cancer, he endured eight painful operations between 1957 and 1963, radiation therapy, a liquid diet, and a new lower jaw fabricated with bone from his hip. No longer able to work in his taverns because of a draining wound from his jaw, he suffered severe bouts of depression. His wife, worried about his mental health, contacted the influential publisher of the Tri-City Herald and asked if an activity of some kind could be found to get him out of the house.

Already concerned about the city’s economic future and its reliance on Hanford, Volpentest willingly enlisted in the effort to incorporate Richland and sell its buildings to their occupants. When that effort succeeded in 1958, he was named chairman of the “Commencement Day” celebration planned for the newly incorporated city. In 1960 he was elected president of the start-up Richland Chamber of Commerce.

Despite his painful and prolonged recovery, Volpentest attacked this new challenge with his characteristic energy and salesmanship. He laid out an activist vision to the small group of chamber members who were all too used to being ignored by the federal government. His first project was to have Richland enter and win Look magazine’s prestigious “All-America City” competition. He organized the campaign and helped make the city’s presentation. Approximately a year later, his picture was on the front page of the Tri-City Herald—his jaw swathed in bandages from a recent operation—pointing up to a sign that proclaimed, “Welcome to Richland: All-America City.”

Volpentest next proposed that the community find the necessary funding to build a 29-mile highway across the flat Hanford Site and a new bridge over the Columbia River at Vernita—then served by a six-car ferry. The new route would significantly decrease the time it took to drive from the isolated Tri-Cities...
to Seattle and Spokane. With the help of his old friend Albert Rosellini, now Washington’s governor, he lobbied the state legislature and Seattle business interests—who were then seeking funding for a new interstate highway through Seattle in time for the Seattle World’s Fair—to support a compromise allowing both projects to be built.

Volpentest’s third goal attracted the most attention locally. By 1962, as a result of greatly expanded production during the Cold War, the nation was awash in plutonium. He heard rumors of proposed cutbacks at Hanford every time he traveled to Washington, D.C., to promote his community. Volpentest believed the federal government needed to make some grand gesture that would convince the local community it would not be abandoned if the work at Hanford was curtailed.

He had a specific grand gesture in mind—a massive new federal building—and he knew just who to ask for it. In 1962, Warren Magnuson was a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

When Volpentest approached him about his idea, Magnuson explained that it normally took at least 15 years for such funding to be authorized and appropriated, and there were 25 federal buildings on the list ahead of the Tri-Cities. However, Magnuson was up for reelection, and he was facing a particularly difficult Republican challenger.

Volpentest went to work raising campaign contributions for Magnuson from local businessmen, Hanford contractors, and labor unions, reminding them of the many ways Magnuson could help the community and noting his own close ties to the senator. In the middle of a hard-fought campaign, Magnuson announced that funds had somehow been found for a new seven-story, $8.2 million federal
building in Richland. Volpentest later said, “I don’t know how he did it, and I didn’t ask.”

Volpentest teamed up with Robert F. Philip and Glenn C. Lee, the owners of the influential Tri-City Herald, to promote other community projects, including better air service and highways, and expanded post-graduate educational opportunities for Hanford’s scientists, engineers, and researchers. They understood that not even a new federal building would save the local economy if plutonium production at Hanford was cut back or eliminated. They decided that their only course of action was to fight any proposed cutbacks in plutonium production at Hanford, or, if that failed, to delay them for as long as possible while some other future mission for Hanford could be found.

Senator Jackson was sympathetic to their cause and referred them to a consultant who was familiar with the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and experienced at helping communities diversify their local economies. With no local funds available to pay for the $25,000 study, Volpentest, Philip, and Lee decided to create a new economic development organization called the Tri-Cities Nuclear Industrial Council (TCNIC). Philip was named its board chairman, and Lee became its president. Volpentest, the only one of the three who was not working, became its unpaid executive. He set out to sell memberships in the new organization with all the sales skill he had acquired over the past 40 years.

The consultant’s report was not very optimistic. General Electric (GE), Hanford’s prime contractor, was unwilling to welcome other contractors to the site or share its research facilities. As a result, Jackson and TCNIC developed a plan to separate the Hanford contract into smaller components and require that each new contractor invest in local non-Hanford projects as the price of receiving a lucrative Hanford contract. These efforts were still in the talking stage when their worst fears became reality.

On January 8, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson stood at the rostrum of the House Chamber in the U.S. Capitol, enjoying the focused attention of the assembled audience while he delivered his first State of the Union Address. Tucked between his sentences honoring John F. Kennedy’s legacy, his support for civil rights, the War on Poverty, and government frugality—was a phrase that fell like a thunderclap on the Tri-Cities community:

> We must not stockpile arms beyond our needs or seek an excess of military power that could be provocative as well as wasteful. It is in this spirit that in this fiscal year we are cutting back our production of enriched uranium by 25 percent. We are shutting down four plutonium piles.

Johnson’s announcement was the first step in the government’s decision to shut down Hanford’s eight production reactors over the next decade. The Tri-Cities business leaders did not know it at the time, but Johnson’s announcement had little to do with plutonium. The reactors were just a convenient target. The primary motivation behind his decision lay in his efforts to pass the long-delayed Civil Rights Act. The former senate majority leader knew that the cost of getting the conservative senate Democratic leadership to allow his civil rights legislation to come up for a vote was his promise to propose a federal budget of less than $1 billion. Cutting back on plutonium production was one way to get there.

Two weeks after Johnson’s address, GE and the AEC delivered another stunning surprise. They jointly announced that GE would be leaving Hanford and that the $1.4 billion in nuclear reactors and related facilities, as well as the $80 million in laboratory facilities it operated, would be rebid and turned over to new contractors. Many Hanford employees immediately started looking for work outside the community. Home foreclosures and business bankruptcies spiked. Volpentest later recalled that “the
whole community was at risk of drying up and blowing away.” Almost daily, Volpentest bombarded Senators Magnuson and Jackson with the latest horror stories about what was going on in the community, his major point being: the federal government created this mess, and it needs to solve it.

The process of replacing GE began almost immediately. Magnuson was able to get some skeptical federal agencies to look at Hanford’s facilities while Jackson plied his considerable influence with the AEC and major defense contractors. When prospective contractors arrived for a visit, Volpentest gave them the red-carpet treatment. His sales pitch always included the availability of existing nuclear and research facilities at Hanford, the unparalleled pool of nuclear construction workers and trained nuclear operators, a community that embraced nuclear energy, vast amounts of inexpensive land and cheap electric power, the recreational benefits of the Columbia River, and the area’s mild climate.

He also never failed to mention his connections to the state’s powerful senators and that his personal influence with them might be useful in resolving any problems associated Hanford. His motivation was never personal—it was about his community. When one potential contractor sent him an unsolicited check to act on their behalf, he immediately sent it back.

New Hanford contractors were largely in place by 1965. Their contractually mandated efforts to create non-Hanford jobs and invest in the broader community produced uneven results. Even when new projects were successful, the jobs they created rarely paid the same high wages or provided the same benefits as those that had been lost. One major exception was Battelle Memorial Institute’s acquisition of the old GE research laboratories. Battelle acquired 275 acres for its new campus and spent $12 million on new buildings. By 1967, there were 2,600 Battelle scientists, engineers, and researchers working on a broad array of scientific research projects.

The slow drip of reactor closure announcements continued throughout the 1960s. Each announcement resulted in a new round of community pessimism. Each new announcement raised questions of how the jobs lost would be replaced. Volpentest came to believe that the answer lay in transforming Hanford into a vast integrated nuclear energy park with as many as 20 nuclear power reactors producing electricity that could be exported, and the resulting financial windfall underwriting the growth and economic diversification of the Tri-Cities. One potential solution to the closures—cleaning up the large amounts of nuclear waste that had been created over the years—was not then considered a viable option by a community of dedicated nuclear supporters.

During the next 20 years, Volpentest’s primary focus was to attract new missions to Hanford. By 1979 he was in his mid-70s, but he continued to work on behalf of TCNIC and the community with Senator Jackson and Senator Magnuson, House Speaker Tom Foley, and other powerful politicians of both parties, cutting deals and finding the money to keep Hanford alive. He became the Tri-Cities’ indispensable lobbyist, making as many as 20 trips a year to Washington, D.C., often at his own expense. His remarkable energy, art of persuasion, infallible memory, and dogged persistence were all the more effective because elected officials and their staffs knew that Volpentest was not being paid for his efforts.

If he did not have an appointment, he would show up at his target’s office first thing in the morning and still be there at the

“Sam was really extraordinary in terms of his persistence. He was like a multiple warhead missile.”
end of the day, waiting patiently, his hands folded on his lap, until an exasperated staff member finally found a way to get the little old man with the white goatee in to see the boss. His exploits became well-known, and people started referring to the “Legend of Sam.” Gerald Grinstein, Magnuson’s outstanding administrative assistant in the 1960s, remembered,

Sam was really extraordinary in terms of his persistence. He was like a multiple warhead missile. He had a project here, a project here, and another project here. He was always working the problem. And then he’d follow up on the telephone, again and again. He was the master of the political process.

Volpentest’s success was partly a result of careful planning before and after his visits. His past career as a successful salesman was another factor. He developed an intuition for what others wanted or needed, and his reasoned presentations reflected this. He had an exceptional memory. He knew the names and telephone numbers of the right contact at hundreds of Capitol Hill and governmental offices. Gary Petersen, who worked with Volpentest on Tri-Cities economic development issues for many years, remembered, “He’d just pick up the telephone and call them. He had all those numbers in his head, and he would almost always be put straight through.”

Working closely with the AEC and the state’s congressional delegation, Volpentest and TCNIC tenaciously sought new projects and missions for Hanford. The New Production Reactor, later known as the N Reactor—designed to produce both plutonium and steam for generating electrical power—was funded in 1958. Funding for the companion $122 million Hanford Steam Generating Plant was narrowly approved in 1962, and Volpentest convinced President Kennedy to attend the dedication in 1963.

The new Fast Flux Test Reactor (FFTF), built at Hanford for $270 million, but with a significant cost overrun, was a major success. Other projects were less successful. The massive $550 million fuels and materials examination facility built next to the FFTF never opened. Millions of dollars were spent exploring the potential of an underground nuclear waste depository at Hanford before the project was ended in favor of Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

Volpentest believed that his dream of a large nuclear energy park at Hanford could be fulfilled by the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS), a state agency that was attempting to build five new nuclear power plants—three of them at Hanford—during the 1970s. The dream was beyond WPPSS’s capabilities. Mismanagement, technical difficulties, labor problems, growing anti-nuclear sentiment, and a massive debt load finally led to a default on $2.25 billion worth of bonds and the layoff of more than 5,000 workers, ending Volpentest’s dream of a Hanford nuclear energy park.

By 1985 times had changed. The production reactors were gone. Efforts to attract new programs and missions to Hanford all fell prey to politics, huge cost overruns, and changing national priorities. Existing programs, such as the multipurpose N Reactor and FFTF either reached the end of their useful life or were unable to attract ongoing support. Widely reported nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl played into the public’s growing concerns about the safety of nuclear energy. Yet Volpentest refused to give up hope. “Don’t ever be afraid to dream,” he would say. “He was,” as one associate remembered, “like a lead horse with blinders on.”

The cumulative result was that a new economic crisis hit the Tri-Cities in the early 1980s that was every bit as intense and painful as the one in 1963. And now both Senators Magnuson and Jackson were also gone—Magnuson lost his 1980 reelection bid and Jackson died as a result of a stroke in 1983. Volpentest’s longtime ally, the Tri-City Herald, had been sold to new owners. The new occupants of the familiar offices on Capitol Hill—Representative Sid Morrison, Senator Slade Gorton and Senator Dan Evans—were Republicans, but Volpentest found ways to work closely with them. On the other hand, many Democrats, like Senator Brock Adams, were openly hostile to Hanford.

TCNIC’s informal management structure and reliance on Hanford contractors was unable to deal with the changing times. The community had grown larger and more diverse.
Local governments, the chambers of commerce, environmental groups, agribusinesses, and organized labor now all demanded a seat at the table. Volpentest believed that the real power and money in the community still rested with the Hanford contractors and that expanding the local economic development effort would result in a blurred message being presented to Congress. “We have to speak with one voice,” he said. Many in the community interpreted his comment as meaning that they had to speak with one voice, so long as it was his.

Over his opposition, the council decided to create a new, more inclusive economic development organization that would engage in a broad spectrum of economic development and diversification activities. In May 1985, TCNIC acquired the debt, assets, and membership of the largest of the local chambers of commerce, reinventing itself as the Tri-City Nuclear Industrial Development Council (TRIDEC). Volpentest insisted that the word “nuclear” be retained in the title.

His objections to TRIDEC were somewhat overcome by the creation of a paid executive vice-president position that left him in sole charge of all Hanford-related activities and government lobbying, while a younger, new president was hired to handle everything else. For the first time, Volpentest, now 81 years old, would be paid for his efforts.

The new TRIDEC board brought together all of the suspicions, distrusts, animosities, and competing community and economic interests that had been building in the Tri-Cities for the past 25 years. Hanford interests, local business, agribusiness, and units of local government—themselves badly fragmented—all held widely differing views about where the organization should focus its efforts. There were complaints from other organizations that were not represented at TRIDEC’s table. The chambers, still upset by the merger, complained that TRIDEC handled business leads that they had first developed.

Gradually, the council’s transition problems and the health of the local economy began to improve. TRIDEC completed two successful community fundraising campaigns and expanded its services to include entrepreneurial development, business assistance, and recruitment of non-Hanford businesses to the community. With the help of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL), they developed a science and technology focused business park in north Richland that was anchored by the laboratory, the Joint Center for Graduate Education, offices of various Hanford contractors, and some non-Hanford businesses created by the contractors. Volpentest’s longstanding interest in improving highway access and air service led to the Tri-Cities finally being included in the interstate highway system. With TRIDEC’s help, a new air terminal was built. A branch campus of Washington State University replaced the Joint Center in north Richland.

By the late 1980s, it was clear that Hanford’s future focus would have to change from production to cleanup. After intense negotiations that lasted almost a year, the Department of Energy (DOE), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the State of Washington signed what became known as the Tri-Party Agreement. For the first time, milestones and time frames were set for cleaning up the site and treating the approximately 56 million gallons of nuclear waste that had been accumulating there for 40 years. It was a difficult and costly transition. If anything, the nuclear industry knew less about cleanup in the late 1980s than it did about plutonium production in the early days of World War II. DOE, its contractors, and the unions struggled to embrace a cleanup mentality and develop and acquire the necessary technology for the job.

The Tri-Party Agreement led to a number of unanticipated consequences, but the largest was the positive impact the injection of $1–$2 billion a year for cleanup had on the still relatively small Tri-Cities economy. Volpentest remained unconvincing at first, considering cleanup jobs to be less important than the ones they were replacing. As cleanup efforts progressed and money flowed into the community, he changed his mind. “The green stuff is just raining down from heaven. All the stuff that’s in the ground at Hanford I think of as a gold mine. The whole world has to be cleaned up, and this is where it could all start,” he said.

Volpentest did some of his most effective work when he was in his 90s. In 1994 he helped broker an agreement between PNNL and DOE to locate the $230 million Environmental Molecular Science Laboratory on the PNNL campus. With the help of new political allies such as Representative Norm Dicks and Senator Patty Murray, he found $365 million to fund the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) on the Hanford site. LIGO was designed to detect gravitational waves believed to have originated...
hundreds of millions of light years away during the dawn of the universe. It was the largest project ever funded by the National Science Foundation. After an extensive redesign and expansion between 2010 and 2014, LIGO detected its first gravitational waves in 2015, proving Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

Volpentest’s last project was also his favorite. It resulted from his newfound belief that Hanford should be the training ground for nuclear cleanup efforts worldwide. The $30 million HAMMER (Hazardous Materials Management and Emergency Response) Education and Training Facility provided realistic training for thousands of Hanford workers who were transitioning to cleanup-related jobs. It was also one of the most difficult funding projects Volpentest ever worked on. To fund the facility, he helped forge a partnership among the federal government, national labor unions, and Hanford contractors. In return, they named the facility in his honor—a decision that was made at DOE’s highest level. Smiling with obvious pride, he said, “It was the most important project I ever worked on.”

After working almost daily on this project for 11 years, Volpentest finally had the pleasure of seeing the HAMMER facility dedicated in a series of ceremonies that took place in September 1997, including a reception and dinner celebrating his 93rd birthday—an event attended by over 350 people.

Today, HAMMER is a unique public-private partnership that includes 10 international labor unions, at least five federal departments, three state agencies, three tribes, three local and regional unions, and two colleges and universities. Almost 3,000 people a month from all over the world receive training in counter-terrorism, detection of nuclear materials, and detection of ancient Native American campsites and cultural artifacts. Some of those closest to Volpentest credited HAMMER with keeping him active and engaged for 15 years.

By the dawn of the new century, Sam Volpentest had become a community icon, with HAMMER, a freeway bridge over the Columbia River, the ballroom at the Richland Red Lion Hotel, and a number of local awards all named in his honor. His annual birthday parties drew hundreds, including old friends, current and former elected officials, and agency executives from both Washingtons.

Volpentest turned 100 on September 24, 2004. More than 700 people attended his birthday celebration, which had to be moved from Richland to a larger hotel in Pasco. Among the awards he received that night was a lifetime achievement award for economic development, a bottle of Jack Daniels bourbon distilled in 1904 for the St. Louis World’s Fair, and a green highway sign designating the primary highway on the Hanford Site as Volpentest Boulevard. At the conclusion of his remarks, he told his audience that there was “still a lot of work remaining to be done” and he intended to be around to help do it. This was not to be. He had to cancel his next birthday party because of ill health, and he died on September 28, 2005, just four days after turning 101. One of his best friends, Robert Ferguson—former DOE official, former managing director of WPPSS, businessman, and chairman of TRIDEC—remembered his close friend:

“It’s difficult to understand all that he’s done when he should have been retired. He had a native intelligence about him that is hard to describe, the best memory and best political instincts I ever saw, and he was committed to his community in ways most people don’t appreciate.

Now a metropolitan area of nearly 290,000 residents, the Tri-Cities is a very different place than it was when Volpentest helped shape its future. Though some problems persist, if he were still alive he would marvel at the economic growth and diversity of his adopted community and remind the rest of us that much more remains to be done. 🙏
Peace Arch Concert was ‘WOODSTOCK OF THE MCCARTHY ERA’

Thousands of people driving by each day on their way between the United States and Canada may have some idea about what the Peace Arch represents. But they probably don’t know much about a fascinating chapter in the monument’s history from the 1950s.

The nearly forgotten chapter in Peace Arch history involves African American performer and activist Paul Robeson. Robeson gave a free concert at the Peace Arch on May 18, 1952. He was not allowed to leave the United States, but thousands came from both sides of the border to hear him perform from a flatbed truck that had been converted to a temporary stage. When a CD of the concert was released in 1998, The Atlantic magazine called it the “Woodstock of the McCarthy Era.”

The story of the Peace Arch concert is not very well known outside labor history and music history circles these days, and it wasn’t covered much by the American media at the time.

Paul Robeson was born in 1898 and was the son of a former slave. He was a star athlete and he earned a law degree from Columbia University. Robeson became a popular singer and actor in the 1930s, known especially for his performance of the Jerome Kerns and Oscar Hammerstein song Ol’ Man River from the Broadway musical Showboat, and for playing the title role in Othello.

In the late 1930s, Robeson became increasingly outspoken about racial inequality and labor issues. He traveled to the Soviet Union, spoke highly of socialism, and came to be viewed by the U.S. government as a controversial activist in the 1940s.

During World War II and the early years of the Cold War, Robeson’s entertainment career stalled. The State Department revoked his passport in 1950, effectively keeping him within the United States.

This was the height of the Cold War and the McCarthy Era, when having left-leaning beliefs could draw the scrutiny of the government, and even ruin a career.

In the 1950s, Robeson remained popular with labor unions. He was invited to speak and perform at the national meeting of the International Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers’ Union in Vancouver, BC in February 1952.

On January 31, Robeson headed north from Seattle by car, but was turned away at the border by the State Department, even though you didn’t need a passport to travel into Canada back then.
Robeson’s detention at the border wasn’t widely reported by local media, but it did make page 14 of The New York Times on February 1, 1952. An American immigration official named John P. Boyd told the paper that Robeson had been notified that if he left the United States, he would be subject to five years’ imprisonment and a $10,000 fine. The law cited by the American authorities, the Times wrote, “bars such departures for ‘the best interests of the Government.’”

So Robeson headed back to Seattle.

Once he got there, he got on the phone. From the Seattle offices of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Hall, Robeson addressed the Vancouver, BC meeting attendees and even sang to them, too. It was in the wake of Robeson’s detention at the border that Harvey Murphy and other union leaders in Vancouver came up with the idea to have Robeson perform at the Peace Arch in May.

Many of these facts are known thanks to the FBI. The agency was tracking Robeson. Biographer Dr. Lindsey Swindall secured copies of the singer’s FBI file.

Swindall is a college professor in Hoboken, New Jersey, but she’s also an expert on the Peace Arch concert, as well as an author and a biographer of Paul Robeson. “Robeson,”
Swindall said, is “probably the most famous celebrity you’ve never heard of.”

Swindall says it was hypocritical for President Truman and the U.S. Government to treat Paul Robeson this way for what she calls “thought crimes,” particularly during the ideological struggle of the Cold War that pitted American values of openness and freedom against the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union.

“[President] Truman was always saying ‘We’re not going to sacrifice civil rights to fight a totalitarian regime,’ but you could look at Robeson and say, ‘Wait a second, you know there’s clear repression here going on,’” Swindall said.

On a 2016 visit to the Peace Arch Historical State Park to see where the concert was held, park manager Jason Snow and local resident Christina Alexander led a tour. Alexander is founder and president of the non-profit International Peace Arch Association, a group based in Blaine that’s dedicated to supporting the monument and offering public programs there.

Standing just south of the Peace Arch and midway between the midday-busy lanes of northbound and southbound vehicle traffic, Alexander described where the May 18, 1952, Paul Robeson concert took place.

“The flatbed was rolled up as close to the boundary as you could get, at an angle that allowed the Canadian side of the park [to see],” Alexander said, with the audience packed into the flat area just east of the Peace Arch and on a now-forested hillside. “The ridge there, that we now see today with a lot of different beautiful trees, allowed that [area] at the time to be like an amphitheater.”

Estimates of crowd size vary from as few as 5,000 to as many as 30,000. Whatever the total, the area was so congested that the border crossing was shut down for more than an hour and many people had to park and walk in from several miles away.

Union official Harvey Murphy introduced Robeson to the crowd. Robeson performed for an hour or so, singing labor songs such as Joe Hill and what were known as Negro spirituals, including No More Auction Block. The program was recorded, and the songs and spoken word were released on 78 rpm records by the union back in the 1950s.

“I stand here today under great stress because I dare, as do you—all of you—to fight for peace and a decent life for all men, women and children wherever they may be,” Robeson told the crowd. “And especially today, I stand fighting for the rights of my people in this America in which I was born.”
16, the City of Seattle changed its mind, and revoked the group’s permit.

According to The Seattle Times, City Building Superintendent John B. Cain “acted under Ordinance 68,445, which bans in public buildings meetings which might tend to engender ‘racial or religious antagonisms.’” Cain was quoted saying Robeson’s appearance would tend to cause antagonism “toward the Negro race.” It wasn’t cited directly in Cain’s remarks, but an infamous riot had broken out prior to a Robeson concert in Peekskill, New York in 1949.

The concert organizers sued the city, and a King County Superior Court judge found in their favor on May 7, 1952. “There is nothing to show that Mr. Cain was justified in finding racial hatred would be engendered by Robeson’s appearance,” Judge Robert M. Jones said in The Seattle Times.

Robeson was allowed to perform at the Civic Auditorium on May 20, 1952, just a few days after the Peace Arch Concert.

Lou Guzzo reviewed the concert for The Seattle Times and wrote, “One third of what the audience heard sounded like a recital; the remainder was more like a series of ideological recitatives set to music.” As for the controversy, Guzzo said there was a total of one picketer in front of the Civic Auditorium.

And while the Civic Auditorium could seat as many as 6,000, Robeson’s FBI file says that exactly 1,723 people were in attendance.

Deborah Daoust, spokesperson for Seattle Center, says that there’s a different set of rules in place nowadays for booking city facilities. In 1963, the City of Seattle repealed the old ordinance that had been used to deny the Seattle group their permit for the Robeson concert, as well as another subsequent ordinance aimed specifically at “subversive” groups.


Northwest labor groups held a 50th anniversary concert at Peace Arch Park back in 2002. Many Seattle groups participated, including the Total Experience Gospel Choir, and actor Danny Glover, who read aloud Robeson’s 1952 remarks. This time, the event was held closer to the Peace Arch parking lot, and border traffic was not affected.

Meanwhile, thousands of people continue to drive through the Peace Arch border crossing every day. Many stop at the park to get a closer look at the distinctive landmark and learn a little bit about its history, and admire the beautifully landscaped grounds surrounding it.

Those visitors won’t find a plaque or interpretive panel commemorating what Paul Robeson and thousands of people did here. Until then, what happened at the Peace Arch on May 18, 1952, is probably the most famous concert they’ve never heard of.

Editor’s Note: a version of this story was first published by MyNorthwest.com, the website for KIRO Radio.

When American singer Paul Robeson was prevented from leaving the United States to perform in Vancouver, BC in 1952, he staged a protest concert at the Canadian border near the Peace Arch instead. Robeson was viewed as a subversive by the U.S. Government at the time, and these documents show he was being tracked by the FBI. He performed subsequent concerts at the Peace Arch in 1953, 1954 and 1955. (Courtesy Dr. Lindsey Swindall)
THURSTON COUNTY

Historical Journal

History enthusiasts in Thurston County have started publishing a small magazine called the Thurston County Historical Journal. The first issue debuted in December 2016, and the fifth issue will be out this April. Plans are to publish three or four times per year.

Karen L. Johnson is the editor. She writes, “Thurston County is one of the few Washington counties without a formal county museum. To help fill that gap, members of the Olympia Historical Society, notably attorney Charlie Roe, came up with the idea of at least having a county-wide publication devoted to our history. Thus the Journal was born.”

Johnson says that the Journal records and celebrates the history of Thurston County. To date, they’ve published articles on railroads, Native American basket weavers, Charles Lindbergh’s visit to the area, Nisqually Valley pioneers, maritime history, mining, early Catholic priests, the introduction of blueberries to Washington, and World War II recycling.

The Journal is published by the Olympia Tumwater Foundation. Financial support comes from Thurston County; the cities of Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater; many of the heritage organizations in the county; and individual donors. Copies are distributed to members of the heritage groups and funding entities. Free copies are also given to public libraries, colleges and every high school in the county. Plans are to eventually make content available online.

For more information, visit olytumfoundation.org; send email to karen@olytumfoundation.org; or call 360-890-2299.

NORTH BEND

Bakery Sheds Bavarian Façade

For 90 years, a building in the east King County town of North Bend has been home to a bakery that’s also served as something of a community mainstay. In the 1970s, when downtown North Bend was bypassed by the new I-90 freeway, civic boosters stole a page from the Leavenworth playbook. They devised a Bavarian makeover that they thought would help attract tourists to the businesses that lined the route of the old Sunset Highway. But the makeover was never fully finished. Some buildings were never modified, while many that were didn’t stay that way. One building that did keep its Alpine façade for more than 40 years was George’s Bakery. Now, thanks to new owners, the original 1928 look of the building has been restored, and the historic preservation community is taking notice. An illustrated article about the restoration work was published recently by The Alliance Review, the quarterly journal of the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions. Crystal Lake, who lives in North Bend and who works for the Northwest Railway Historical Museum, wrote about the bakery for The Alliance Review and shared photos of the building’s amazing transformation.

(Photos courtesy Crystal Lake)
WASHINGTON AT WAR
The Evergreen State in World War I

In commemoration of the centennial of World War I, historian Dr. Lorraine McConaghy is traveling around the state to give a special presentation and reader’s theatre. Washington at War: The Evergreen State in World War I covers the period between the successful Prohibition referendum of 1914 through Seattle’s General Strike and President Woodrow Wilson’s visit to Washington in 1919. Dr. McConaghy’s talk is presented by Humanities Washington and the Washington State Historical Society. See her presentation at these locations:

- Wednesday, April 18, 12 noon, Yakima Valley Museum in Yakima
- Thursday, April 26, 7 p.m., Moses Lake Museum & Art Center
- Friday, May 4, 7 p.m., Port Townsend City Hall


A 1917 postcard shows a large group of men who are draftees at Camp Lewis in Pierce County, WA. (Courtesy Edward Nolan Collection. WSHS, 2017.2.182)

RICHLAND
Glasnost & Goodwill

The Franklin County Museum in Richland is hosting a traveling edition of the Washington State Historical Society’s recent exhibit Glasnost & Goodwill: Citizen Diplomacy in the Northwest. The exhibit is about Cold War-era citizen-initiated business and cultural ties between the Northwest and the Soviet Union. It will be on view until the end of June 2018.

First USA-USSR Joint Venture. Picture of Marine Resources (U.S.-Bellingham) and USSR (Ministry of Fisheries-Moscow), 1976.

VASHON ISLAND
Japanese-American History

The Vashon Island Heritage Museum will premiere a new exhibit on the Japanese-American history of Vashon Island, opening in April. Joy and Heartache: Japanese Americans on Vashon from 1900 to the Present features artifacts and photos from the museum’s collection, as well as oral histories and a reproduction of an internment barrack. Museum hours and details are available at vashonheritagemuseum.org.

B.D. Mukai, in center with bowler hat, with the children of pickers at his strawberry farm on Colvos Road on Vashon Island, circa 1915. (Courtesy Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum)
SPIRIT IN THE ROCK: The Fierce Battle for the Modoc Homelands
By Jim Compton
WSU Press, $27.95
Review by Stephanie Martin

In the Modoc War of 1872-1873, a small band of 53 warriors and their families took refuge in a natural rock fortress in what’s now Lava Beds National Monument. They held their ground for five months against a much larger contingent of U.S. Army soldiers. Led by Keintpoos (Captain Jack), the Modoc people fought to remain on their ancestral land.

In Spirit in the Rock, late author Jim Compton, longtime journalist and former Seattle City Councilmember, relates the circumstances that led to the Modoc people being removed from their land for a railroad and a “massive irrigation scheme.” With their traditional enemies, the Klamaths, to the north and the empire-building attitude of the Applegate family, the Modoc people could not stop the forces that overtook them. Captain Jack’s story shows the human side of a drama unfolding, fraught with politicians and reporters. He comes to a bad end, is hung with four others, and their skulls and scalps are surgically removed and collected by the Army Medical Museum. See Chapter 37 for an explanation of the Army’s horrific penchant for collecting Native skulls after the Civil War.

Events gleaned from 40 newspapers of the time provide hard details and insight into the Euro-centric culture of 1873. Every misstep of the Modoc people was recorded by a reporter and rushed by horseback to a newspaper office. There is little Native voice in this narrative because few at that time had knowledge of the oral history of the tribes. Some newspapers called out the injustices but we find out little of what the Modoc people thought. The foreword by Vivian Arviso is beautifully written and does offer a Native perspective into the plight of the Modoc people. An excellent bibliography, color plates, and historic maps give the reader additional awareness into the battle for the Modoc homelands.

NEW PODCAST
COLUMBIA Conversations
An online interview with Peter Donahue

Want to hear more from COLUMBIA?
COLUMBIA Conversations is a new audio podcast that goes beyond the printed page to present conversations with COLUMBIA contributors and other interesting people working to preserve and share Washington history. With each episode, you’ll hear from authors, historians and researchers on the frontlines of Northwest history!

Visit ColumbiaConversations.org for the latest episode, featuring COLUMBIA contributor Peter Donahue talking about his work to rediscover and share the stories of Northwest writers from the past.

IN SEARCH OF ALEXANDER PANTAGES:
Head of the Vaudeville Circuit
By Griselda “Babe” Lehrer
Tacoma Historical Society Press, $29.95
Review by Feliks Banel

Alexander Pantages is well-remembered as a vaudeville impresario who built theatres all over the Northwest, including in Spokane, Tacoma, and Seattle as well as in Oregon, California and Canada. Griselda “Babe” Lehrer was part of the effort to preserve the Pantages Theatre in Tacoma in the early 1980s, and she later spent a decade or more compiling research and photographs to tell the relatively unknown saga of Pantages, from his early days in the Yukon, to his time in prison, to his death in 1936 at age 65. Though Lehrer herself passed away in 2015 at age 93, editor Ethan Yarborough and Tacoma Historical Society Press earlier this year published this book based on Lehrer’s research and the nearly-finished manuscript she left behind.
MLK ASSASSINATION

Washington State’s Reaction

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968.

The civil rights leader was pronounced dead just after 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time, and word reached the West Coast in the early evening on that Thursday 50 years ago.

While widespread violence broke out in many cities in other parts of the United States, public reaction was relatively restrained in the Pacific Northwest.

In Seattle that evening, public TV station KCTS-9 produced an impromptu live discussion program, drawing praise from a local media critic who wrote “Most notable, perhaps, was a special that Seattle’s educational station, KCTS-TV, put together on short notice. It was the first time within memory that Channel 9 has exhibited much enterprise on the news front.”

On Friday, April 5, Governor Daniel J. Evans ordered flags flown at half-staff over state buildings. In Seattle, Mayor Dorm Braman did the same for city facilities, and public schools were dismissed early.

Before the early dismissal, Rev. Samuel McKinney addressed an assembly at Seattle’s Garfield High School, urging that “black people and white people of good faith band together in mourning.” Friday afternoon Metro League track meets, baseball games and tennis matches were canceled.

At the University of Washington, President Dr. Charles E. Odegaard ordered all classes dismissed at 11:30 a.m. A modestly-attended outdoor memorial got underway at 11:45 a.m. on campus just west of the Husky Union Building, better known as the HUB.

At noon, a 24-hour prayer vigil began at Seattle’s First African Methodist Episcopal Church on Capitol Hill. Noon was also the hour of a delayed opening, statewide, of liquor stores operated by the Washington State Liquor Control Board.

On Sunday, coordinated marches began at several Seattle and Seattle area churches, with columns of marchers converging on Seattle Center for a planned 2:00 p.m. public memorial for Dr. King at the old Seattle Center Arena.

But far more people showed up than the 4,500 or so that the Arena could handle, so the start of the memorial was delayed, and the program was moved next door to Seattle Center’s High School Memorial Stadium.

Governor Daniel J. Evans told the assembled crowd, “This outspoken emotion and sorrow represented by the 10,000 here today proves conclusively there is a soul to this city, if sometimes it seems muted.”

Then Governor Evans asked, “Does it always take martyrdom to cause concern?”

A crowd gathered together on the west side of the Husky Union Building (HUB) on the University of Washington campus the day after the murder in Memphis of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Photo by Stuart B. Hertz, Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Museum of History & Industry Photograph Collection, 1986.5.31473.1)

Rev. Dr. Samuel McKinney gave a eulogy for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom he met when they were both students at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia in the 1950s. Dr. McKinney was, for 40 years, the pastor at Mount Zion Baptist Church in Seattle, home to the oldest and largest African American congregation in the state of Washington. (Photo by Robert H. Miller, Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Museum of History & Industry Photograph Collection, 1986.5.31474)
ANITA PETTIBONE
The Novels of a Spokane Native

Spokane novelists have won the Washington State Book Award in Fiction for the past three years: Bruce Holbert (2015), Sharma Shields (2016), and Shawn Vestal (2017). One of the Northwest’s most successful writers, Jess Walter, hails from the Lilac City. Yet, there was a time when Spokane writers garnered little or no attention. One exception was Anita Pettibone (1896-1975).

The daughter of pioneer parents, Pettibone grew up on the coast, attended the University of Washington, and married another pioneer descendent, Robert Schnebly, with whom she moved to Spokane. Pettibone became well known in the more than 50 years she lived there. She knew the Davenports, as well as poet Vachel Lindsay, who lived in the Davenport Hotel from 1924 to 1929. Pettibone inscribed a copy of her first novel “To Vachel, Who has taught me so many lively things.”

Pettibone’s first novel, The Bitter Country (1925), is set in and around the town of Naselle, half way between Willapa Bay and the Columbia River in Pacific County. The white inhabitants are mostly Scandinavians and Finns, with the former viewing the latter as clannish and ignorant. Hence, when Eric’s Norwegian father abandons his Finnish mother for a Swedish woman, Eric denounces dad and takes his mother’s maiden name instead. He also rejects his father’s logging business to become a fisherman, and when log booms threaten his fish traps, he sets himself against his father and half-brother.

Into this fray comes Ellen Fargo, a fresh-faced school teacher. She’s taken in by the Finns and begins instructing their children (Lampa, Taivo, Vakko, Raha, and Liempi, among others) on how to be American. In turn, she learns what it means to be Finnish, from steam baths and community dances, to superstition and fatalism. She draws the line at domestic abuse, though, and intervenes to stop a father whose idea of discipline for his daughter is a brutal beating. Eventually, Ellen falls in love with Eric, and from there the novel follows a classic girl-meets-boy-loses-boy-gets-boy-back storyline.

Along the way, Pettibone depicts a corner of the state rarely seen in Northwest literature. This is an area of tidal estuaries and thickly forested hills: “Cedar and spruce rose in quiet dignity to misty heights with gray-green moss hanging long attenuated veils from the fragrant branches and trailing in the sucking waters below…. Indeed, the river was the only path possible through this wilderness, and even it had to pick and choose its way.” For goods and services, residents venture south to Astoria or north to South Bend. During her summer break, Ellen escapes to Seattle.

It would be 17 years before Pettibone published her second novel, Light Down, Stranger (1942), which is based partly on her and her husband’s pioneer families. Set in Washington Territory in the 1870’s, it follows Will Rench as he journeys from the Willamette Valley to work for his empire-building uncle, who lives in the fictional town of Clagget, somewhere between Wallula and Walla Walla. Judge Bal- lance, who is not a judge at all, is a former slave-owner from Virginia with an insufferable debutante daughter. He’s also a double-crosser. Upon learning this, Will breaks from the judge and, accompanied by his faithful pinto, sets out on his own. Driving cattle and leading packhorse trains, he traverses the Columbia Plateau from Lewiston to Fort Colville to the Methow Valley.

Pettibone’s portrayal of the region’s native people here is notable. Despite being “a peace-loving cuss,” Will joins a posse pursuing Indians who have stolen settlers’ horses and who are associated with Smohalla, the dreamer-prophet. At one point, a posse member says he can’t wait until the “redskins” are all herded onto reservations. When Lovina, Will’s sweetheart, recounts how Cayuse attacked the mission where she once lived, she exclaims, “Indians ain’t human.” Will sympathizes, but thinks, “A good many [Indians] had shared their lands and crops with white settlers … and then found themselves run off or killed,” and understands
OFF TO ST. LOUIS!

Audio clip from Campus Radio Theater radio broadcast from Lincoln High School, Tacoma, Thanksgiving 1950. Lincoln High School Choir, conducted by Margaret Rawson Goheen, singing “Dear Lincoln” by Joe Jordan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82zSinUZf8I


SAM VOLPENTEST: THE GODFATHER OF THE TRI-CITIES

Background on the Hanford Engineer Works page from the Atomic Heritage Foundation, https://www.atomicheritage.org/tour-stop/hanford-engineer-works#WpBL6pOGNsZ


WOODSTOCK OF THE MCCARTHY ERA


MAPS & LEGENDS


BOCA DE FLON?

Deception Indeed!

In his classic 1923 book *Origin of Washington Geographic Names*, historian and author Edmond Meany calls Deception Pass, between Whidbey Island and Fidalgo Island, “one of the most remarkable geographical features in the State of Washington.” As anyone who’s been there knows, this is no exaggeration. The bridge that came along 12 years after Meany’s book only serves to make the scenery of this narrow, treacherous and tide-tossed waterway even more dramatic, and much more accessible.

And it’s fairly well known that Deception Pass was first called by this name, or the longer form “Deception Passage,” by Captain George Vancouver in 1792. Vancouver, surveying the Native ground of the Northwest coast on behalf of Great Britain, felt he’d been deceived by the look of the terrain and mistakenly assumed that a very long island was a peninsula. It was Vancouver’s crewmember Joseph Whidbey who came upon the narrow passage, and for whom Whidbey Island was then named.

Before Vancouver, Meany writes, the Spanish chart prepared in 1791 by Francisco Eliza named the dramatic feature Boca de Flon. Meany doesn’t translate, but “boca” literally means “mouth” or “entrance” or “exit” in Spanish. Were the Spaniards also deceived? Did they think this was the mouth of a river? Or were they using “boca” as it sometimes used to describe an object shaped like the mouth of a funnel?

And what about “de Flon”? On this, Meany is mum. But Henry R. Wagner in his 1937 two-volume *Cartography of the Northwest Coast of America to the Year 1800* writes, “The only Flon I know of at this period was Manuel de Flon, a lieutenant colonel in the army and Governor of Puebla in New Spain. He was a brother-in-law of the Viceroy, Bernardo de Gálvez.”
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