With the WA State History Museum app, you can hold history in the palm of your hand!

Access to artifacts and exhibitions is as close as your digital device. The app’s digital tours share highlights of exhibitions in the State History Museum, and offer links to resources both in and outside of the museum. You can explore the history of the Evergreen State no matter where you are. Best of all, it is FREE!

The app also includes K-12 curriculum in the form of History Lessons To Go. Give our lighter Activity Sheets a try, too; they complement the exhibition tours on the app.

Get all the details at: https://www.washingtonhistory.org/visit/wa-state-history-museum-app/

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TAKING PLACE VIRTUALLY OCTOBER 21–23, 2020
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I hope this autumn issue of COLUMBIA finds you and your loved ones better off, or, at least feeling better adjusted to the circumstances in which we all find ourselves in this disturbingly historic year of 2020. Our previous issue was focused solely on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we went to press just as demonstrations were beginning to take place around the country following the death of George Floyd.

As I write this message, those demonstrations are continuing in some communities, and elected leaders and public officials are working to implement changes to law enforcement and social service agencies to reflect those reforms that protesters are calling for. It’s not likely to be a linear—or smooth—process, but most are hopeful for meaningful change.

Among our museums, archive and heritage organization colleagues around the Evergreen State, most facilities remain closed to the public. However, many museums—including the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma—are offering virtual programs, and sharing online resources to help educators and parents better serve school-age children. As parents of young children already know, K-12 schools in Washington have been closed since March, and many will be offering only online classes this fall to avoid spread of the coronavirus. The same is true for many two and four-year colleges as well.

The adjustments that all of us have had to make, whether at home or as employees or students—or even as shoppers at the grocery store—have contributed to a sense, for some, of not really knowing what might be coming next in the intersecting realms of epidemiology, politics and civic affairs. As far as COLUMBIA is concerned, with this issue, we have returned to our regular format. And, while the impacts of the pandemic and unrest are not absent from the following pages, we have tried to resume our regularly scheduled efforts to highlight interesting and relevant history of the Pacific Northwest.

We’re particularly excited to publish color images of art created in the Northwest in the 1930s by the WPA and other federal programs, and to share information about the upcoming Pacific Northwest History Conference in late October, which will be online this year and widely accessible to anyone with web access. Finally, we’ve devoted a few pages to interesting books about Northwest history that had the misfortune to be published during the pandemic, and that our readers might have missed. We hope you’ll see something you like, and take the opportunity to support a local author and/or local bookstore in your community.

As always, I welcome your emails to editor@columbia.ghost.com. Thanks for supporting COLUMBIA and the Washington State Historical Society.

CONTESTED SPACES
Power and Resistance in the Pacific Northwest

67th Pacific Northwest History Conference
Wednesday, October 21 through Friday, October 23, 2020
Presented by the Washington State Historical Society
For more information or to register:
https://www.washingtonhistory.org/heritage-resources/pacific-northwest-history-conference/

IN THIS ISSUE

FELIX BANEL
COLUMBIA Editor

MARGARET BULLOCK
Forgotten Stories: Northwest Public Art of the 1930s
Margaret Bullock is Interim Chief Curator and Curator of Collections and Special Exhibitions at Tacoma Art Museum. Her specialty is American art of the 19th to mid-20th century, with a particular focus on the art and artists of the Pacific Northwest. She has been researching New Deal art projects in the region for nearly 20 years.

HANNALORE HEIN
Linda Brokaw, Vardis Fisher
HannaLore Hein recently joined the Idaho State Historical Society as the agency’s first professional state historian since 1956. As Idaho State Historian, Ms. Hein is a content resource to Idaho’s executive and legislative branches of government on topics related to Idaho history; assists in the agency’s·

STEPHANIE JOHNSON-TOLIVER
Washington Gallery: William Grose
Stephanie Johnson-Toliver is president of the Black Heritage Society of Washington State. She is a proud fourth-generation Seattleite, and serves as co-chair of the Historic Central Area Arts & Cultural District, and as a member of the Museum of History & Industry (MOHAI) Board of Trustees.

ED NOLAN
Collecting Washington: VJ Day
Edward Nolan is Head of Special Collections for the Washington State Historical Society. Nolan is an author and photo historian, and a fourth-generation Washingtonian, who joined the staff of the historical society in 1990 after working at other distinguished institutions across the Pacific Northwest.

LORRAINE RATH
Nettie Craig Ashbery: Here Lies a Suffragist
Lorraine Rath is Senior Graphic Designer for the Washington State Historical Society, and an expert on typography.

C. MARK SMITH
Maps & Legends: Hanford
C. Mark Smith is an author and historian. He is the recipient of the 2010 John H. McClelland Jr. Award for the best article to appear in COLUMBIA, and the 2015 Murray Morgan Award for Preserving and Communicating Local History, presented by the Tacoma Historical Society.

CONTRIBUTORS
The talented writers, historians and archivists from around the Northwest whose work appears in this issue.

CONTENTS

POWER AND RESISTANCE

IN THE NEWS

I like so many programs since the arrival of COVID-19, the Pacific Northwest History Conference will be virtual this year. The 67th edition of the conference, which is presented by the Washington State Historical Society, runs Wednesday, October 21 through Friday, October 23.

While most of the panel discussions and other academic presentations require paid registration to take part, there will be several programs of general interest made available for free to anyone with an internet connection.

Allison Campbell, Heritage Outreach Manager for the Historical Society, is producing the conference with help from a range of history professionals from around the Northwest. “Our program committee, which is made up of really distinguished historians, public historians, tribal historians, and labor historians chose the theme of ‘Contested Spaces: Power and Resistance in the Pacific Northwest,’” Campbell said. “When we chose this theme eight months ago, we knew that the conference would be on the eve of the election. We knew that it was in the year of the suffrage centennial, but in no way could we have predicted just how timely it would ultimately be.”

The conference has played a unique role in the region for many years, which Campbell says becomes clear whenever members of the program committee share stories about their earliest experiences. “A few of them remember this conference as being the first place they presented a paper as grad students—it was their first foray into these kinds of academic conferences,” Campbell said. “I think that’s awesome.”

While the move to an online-only conference because of the pandemic has its drawbacks, Allison Campbell says there are some unexpected potential benefits from this format, too. There are no travel costs involved this year, no hotel or rental car reservations to be made. People from across the Northwest can participate from the comfort of their homes or offices. The events can be spread out over several days and it will be easier for participants to attend multiple events, whereas with the on-the-ground conference they may have had to choose between simultaneous sessions. While participants will miss the collegial camaraderie of an in-person conference, the virtual conference is a good solution for 2020. To find out more or register to attend, visit https://www.washingtonhistory.org/exhibitions-events/events/.

COLUMBIA 3 | HERITAGE NEWS
We hope to be able to engage historical organizations across our state in a similar process of introspection, we will be transparent about our failures as well and are committed to learning from them. In doing so, these actions publicly and transparently. We probably won't get everything right on the first attempt, but of partnering with our communities to explore how history connects us all.

To make manifest this vision. This lack of diversity limits our ability to meaningfully live out our mission diversity, equity, and accessibility outlined in our strategic plan, we have not taken all of the necessary steps trustees remain predominantly White. While we have an organizational commitment to embrace inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility outlined in our strategic plan, we have not taken all of the necessary steps to make manifest this vision. This lack of diversity limits our ability to meaningfully live out our mission of partnering with our communities to explore how history connects us all.

We are committed to taking concrete steps to build a more inclusive organization. We pledge to take these actions publicly and transparently. We probably won’t get everything right on the first attempt, but we will be transparent about our failures as well and are committed to learning from them. In doing so, we hope to be able to engage historical organizations across our state in a similar process of introspection, community dialogue, and evolution of practice that will benefit us all.

Belonging: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The Historical Society’s commitment to address systemic racism

The Washington State Historical Society (WSHS) has witnessed the turmoil in our nation of the past months and the outpouring of grief and pain by the Black community. We acknowledge the historical truths that underpin the protests in our state and in our nation: slavery, discriminatory laws, and racism that permeates our systems of justice, housing, healthcare, and more. We have also taken stock of our own institution’s role in systemic racism and acknowledge the need to address it.

Founded nearly 130 years ago, as was the case with historical societies across the United States, the Historical Society’s origins are rooted in the desire to document the arrival of White explorers and settlers to Washington Territory, and to remember and memorialize how they transformed this place by their presence. Such a perspective guided the work of the Historical Society for decades upon its inception. Objects were collected, markers and monuments were placed, and selected histories were recorded that privileged the lives and legacies of these White men.

In recent decades, leading up to today, the Historical Society has embraced a more diverse perspective—collecting more broadly, reaching out to diverse communities, and working toward sharing a more inclusive history. Museum practices across the U.S. have evolved, and so have we. And yet, our staff and board of trustees remain predominantly White. While we have an organizational commitment to embrace inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility outlined in our strategic plan, we have not taken all of the necessary steps to make manifest this vision. This lack of diversity limits our ability to meaningfully live out our mission of partnering with our communities to explore how history connects us all.

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Moving forward, we are committed to the following:

1. By November 2020, we will develop a plan to increase the diversity of the WSHS board of trustees and staff that addresses barriers to inclusion at all steps of the selection process. This plan will be informed by the input of our community. We will value the unique perspective and skills that each trustee, employee, and volunteer brings to our organization and provide an inclusive environment that provides opportunities for personal and professional growth.

2. Through exhibitions, public programs, education, outreach, and collecting, we will continue to build upon our work to bring voice to the diverse people of Washington, especially those whose voices have been silenced or minimized in the past. For example, flowing from our work with the Black community during our recent Men of Change exhibition, we will partner with groups statewide to develop robust learning resources focused on the history of Black Washingtonians, to debut in Spring 2021. In 2020 we will also open a new gallery in our Great Hall of Washington History focused on the unjust incarceration of Japanese Americans in Washington State during WWII. Our newest permanent gallery renovation will provide an opportunity to share multiple viewpoints regarding the impacts, both societal and economic, of the settlement and industrialization of Washington. We will seek our partnerships with Black, Native American, Latins, Asian and Pacific Islander, LGBTQ+ and other underrepresented communities to ensure their stories are recorded and shared.

3. Building on an initial training session held July 2, 2020, WSHS will identify and provide training for all staff focused on infusing diversity, equity and inclusion principles into our daily practice, as well as policies and official procedures. This work will begin immediately and continue as standard institutional practice.

4. WSHS will research and develop a comprehensive list of historical markers and monuments placed by the Society across time and review these markers for structural integrity, historical accuracy, and language/interpretive sensitivity. We will bring sound scholarship, diverse perspectives, and community conversation forward to determine whether, as tangible objects of our work, these markers continue to uphold our mission and values.

5. We will prioritize making our object and archival collections more accessible to the public in person and online, and increase our partnership with Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color to proactively collect objects that reflect their lived experiences and histories. Only by collecting broadly, now, can we ensure our ability to tell these stories authentically in the future.

6. We will audit language in our collections database and previously developed language in the Washington State History Museum’s permanent exhibition galleries to ensure that the writing reflects cultural sensitivity and respect. This project will be ongoing until completed and will involve community input in a variety of ways.

We hope that our greatest partner in these endeavors will be the people of Washington. We invite you to learn more about the Society, its programs and collections at www.washingtonhistory.org.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kilmer, Director
WSHS Board of Trustees
Washington’s popular three-term Republican Governor Daniel J. Evans had chosen to not seek a fourth term, and King County Executive John Spellman secured the Republican nomination. On the Democratic side, Dr. Dixy Lee Ray beat out Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman. That year’s contest was the first national election to be held after the Watergate scandal and 1974 resignation of President Richard Nixon, and President Gerald Ford’s subsequent pardoning of the disgraced Commander in Chief. Disillusioned voters looked to non-traditional, outsider candidates like Governor Carter, famous for being a peanut farmer, and to Dr. Ray, who was known as a scientist and as the public face of Seattle’s Pacific Science Center.

Dr. Ray was an outspoken and idiosyncratic candidate, and was politically conservative by Evergreen State standards, especially for a Democrat. She was born in Tacoma in 1914 and graduated from Stadium High School, ultimately earning a PhD in biology from Stanford and holding positions at the University of Washington, Pacific Science Center and the United States Atomic Energy Commission. By the time she ran for governor, she was in her 60s and was something of an unusual figure in the world of Northwest politics.

Once in office, Governor Ray often battled with the press and legislature, and faced governing challenges beyond her control, such as the national recession and runaway interest rates of the late 1970s. She was also forced to address the sudden threat and deadly eruption of Mount St. Helens in 1980, and came under criticism for the size and lax enforcement of a “Red Zone” or restricted area around the mountain where many victims died.

Dixy Lee Ray lost a primary challenge in 1980 to fellow Democrat Jim McDermott, who then lost to Republican John Spellman in the general election. It was also the year that Ronald Reagan was elected president. Governor Spellman served just one term and failed in his reelection bid. Since 1984, all subsequent Washington governors have been Democrats.

COLUMBIA editor Feliks Banel spoke with two Washingtonians who, as journalists 40-plus years ago, covered aspects of Governor Dixy Lee Ray’s single term in office. Here, in their own words, John Dodge and David Ammons share memories and insights as they look back on the Dixy Lee Ray administration and Dr. Ray herself decades after she left office.

Portions have been edited and condensed for clarity.
JOHN DODGE is a retired newspaper journalist and author based in Olympia, Washington. During the late 1970s, he was a reporter for The Daily World in Aberdeen.

First encounter…with poodle

“I first encountered Dixy Lee Ray when I was a freshman at the University of Washington in 1967. I was a member of the Delta Upsilon fraternity and we had a tradition of a monthly guest speaker for a dinner talk in our dining hall. I remember vividly Dixy Lee Ray, who at the time was the director of the Pacific Science Center and still lecturing at the University of Washington, where she began her teaching career in 1945. I cannot for the life of me remember the topic, but I remember she brought one of her pet toy poodles with her. She put the dog under her chair at the dining room table and it jumped up and down from the floor to her lap, and she fed most of her meal to the dog by hand. So I knew this was a different kind of lady right from the start.”

Trailblazer, iconoclast, contrarian

“She was a trailblazer and she did things that no woman had ever done before, including serving as the first female zoology department professor at the University of Washington. I do not think she would consider herself a feminist, and I think feminists did not consider her an ally in the Equal Rights Act movement. She was so iconoclastic, and such a contrarian, there was something about her personality. She was strongly opposed to the environmental movement, even though she was a grounded scientist and biology major, and got her degree at Stanford…needless to say, she was a very complex person.”

Dislike for the legislature and the press

“She had a dislike for the legislature. She had a dislike for the press. She was supporting oil tankers in Puget Sound at a time when the mainstream Democratic leaders and party officials and legislators were all opposed to it. She was pro-growth to an extreme that you would never typically see in the Democratic Party.”

Nuclear power and WPPSS

“John [Hughes, editor and publisher of the Aberdeen Daily World] assigned me to cover the construction project of the Satsop Nuclear Power Plant in the Elma area in eastern Grays Harbor County. Two commercial nuclear power plants were under construction of five that the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS—pronounced “whoops”) attempted to build in the late 1970s and early 1980s. On March 29, 1979 the United States experienced its most significant and most serious commercial nuclear power plant accident in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania at Three Mile Island. It scared people and it provided ammunition for folks that were opposed to nuclear power. So Dixy quickly became much more available than usual to the press. In fact, I was able to get a phone interview with her from the Governor’s Office the next morning after the accident, where she wanted to reassure the people of Grays Harbor and the general population that this wasn’t a setback for the nuclear power industry. She fervently believed in nuclear power.”

Red Zone at Mount St. Helens

“It was acknowledged that she was having a lot of meetings with Weyerhaeuser officials and they had her ear in terms of how big the Red Zone should be, and I’m sure that the Red Zone was much smaller than probably some of the geologists and volcanologists would have recommended. And if that mountain had blown Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday rather than a Sunday morning in May, there would have been hundreds of people in the Red Zone working—timber workers, tree cutters and others—and the death toll would have been far greater. Hindsight is 20/20 in this case, and…I don’t think anybody imagined that the lateral blast would be as forceful as it was. But I still think that if you had someone in the room with her saying that ‘We need to get everybody out of there within a 50-mile radius’ versus someone that says ‘I think we should be allowed to continue to operate with just minimal restrictions,’ I think I know what side she’d land on.”

Interacting with the press

“She did have a sense of humor, but boy, she was thin-skinned. She did not like being questioned. I’ve been in interviews with her where she’s just in my face jabbing me in the chest with her finger and spitting words out at me, like ‘How dare you! How dare you even question me on that?’ She was an interesting lady.”


RIGHT: Governor Dixy Lee Ray, depicted in an illustration as a goldfinch—Washington’s state bird—was featured on the cover of TIME magazine on December 12, 1977; the article inside is titled “Dixy Rocks the Northwest.” Washington State Historical Society, 1996.120.147.
Right place at the right time

“Dixy Lee Ray was a woman well-regarded in her field. She was a celebrity of sorts in the Seattle area. She was director of the Pacific Science Center, and she did Channel 9 lectures, and I think of her as the ‘Julia Child of science.’ She was apparently a wonderful teacher, and later went to the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission. She was apparently a wonderful teacher, and later went to the Commission chair. She was a daughter of the times. It was the right place at the right time. It was always a sign that you’re going to be in trouble if you can’t get along with the Capitol press corps.”

A different kind of candidate

“The press loved her [as a candidate], which is ironic given her later antipathy for the media, but she cut a very interesting figure with knee socks and her poodles, and her sort of mannish haircuts and saved-off clothes, and just was a different kind of politician. Definitely outside. We had had 12 years of [Republican Governor] Dan Evans, who was the straight-laced Boy Scout, very ‘by the rule books,’ and he knew how to work with all of the powerbrokers in Olympia, and was extremely good at what he did. I don’t know how she decided to become a Democrat. Governor Ray was very conservative in many regards, and so she took Olympia by storm.”

Fish out of water

“I think she did her best to keep the trains running on time. In terms of actual bills, I don’t think she really had much of an agenda per se, or she was certainly not looking for any great reforms or things to hang her hat on. I just think she was trying her best to run the government, and it was pesky and she didn’t listen to lots of people. She was a fish out of water. Her skill sets weren’t equipped for the task at hand and she did fight with the legislature all the time. She fought with lobbyists. She didn’t make nice with the Democratic establishment. She definitelywarred with the press, which was always a sign that you’re going to be in trouble if you can’t get along with the Capitol press corps.”

Pesky legislators

“She canceled the legislative session in 1978, as I recall. She said, ‘Well, they don’t really need to meet at that time.’ It wasn’t automatic [that the legislature meet]. But [her predecessor, Governor Daniel J.] Evans had called special sessions every even-numbered year, thinking that we were a big state and there’s always stuff going on. This is the time of the original [Judge Robert] Doran decision on schools and the order [for the state] to fully fund basic education. There was a lot going on, and Evans had been a believer in activist government, and [Governor Ray] sort of thought smaller government was better. And being governor is better than having these pesky legislators in town.”

To serve the press

“She had a little farm on Fox Island [in south Puget Sound]. One day, we came into a press conference—which was fairly rare—that she would even hold one. And there were little packets at [each reporter’s] place around the table, and we were going, ‘What the hell?’ And she said, ‘Gentlemen, that is sausage, and I had a litter of pigs and I named one for each of you.’ She said ‘I later slaughtered them and made sausage out of them.’ It’s so Freudian.”

See you in the funny papers

“I remember she had a Christmas reception, which was, at the time, very common for governors to do—that was considered a good thing to do. I was standing with David Horsey [then Seattle Post-Intelligencer (PI) political cartoonist] during the cocktail hour part of it, and [Governor Ray] came over and she says, ‘Oh, I have something to show you.’ So we went with her, and she had this paraconic in a cage and she says, ‘Oh, Mr. Horsey, would you look at the bottom of the cage?’ I have found a use for the PI. And she just laughed and people were going like ‘Ha ha, that’s really funny.’ But that was the PI. It was the outlet that she hated the most.”

Carrying Weyerhaeuser’s water around Mount St. Helens

“I remember flying around with her on a little state plane to sort of get the lay of the land, see where the timber stands were and so forth [around Mount St. Helens in 1980 before the eruption]. She was kind of loathe to have a large Red Zone... she was very much of the ‘timber is a crop to be harvested’ school of thought. She didn’t like FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] and President Jimmy Carter and others who were trying to [make the Red Zone larger]. And some of her more level-headed advisers in Olympia were saying the same thing. ‘You’ve got to get people. You’ve got to get them out of there.’ So eventually she concurred in what the eventual Red Zone was, but it was considerably larger than she would have liked. So that was everybody’s take on her, that she was carrying Weyerhaeuser’s water. And that was kind of risky given what would we later know.”

End of the honeymoon

“I think of her re-election bid in 1980. I think she had a lot of fights with the legislature and didn’t have a session that year, and just the continuing rumble of stories out of Olympia was that she wasn’t up to [the job]. It’s kind of a contact sport in Olympia, and she was used to being the professor who wasn’t questioned and the head of the classroom. And I think that’s one of the reasons she didn’t get along with the press because we ask impertinent questions or at least [skirty] questions. We questioned her... that was our role, and she didn’t quite understand that and thought we were just, you know, unspeakable cretins. And so I just think [the Democratic establishment] were ginning for her. They ganged up on her at the State Democratic Convention out in Hoquiam [in 1980], and Senator [Warren G.] Magnuson made it very clear that the party shouldn’t back her for reelection, and they cheered Jim McDermott who was there. She got stomped on by McDermott. And, of course, then he went on to lose to John Spellman.”

Life after the Governor’s Mansion

“She was a woodcutter. That was her passion in the art world, and she was very good. After she was dumped [by the voters] and shunted home, I went up to Fox Island just to do a piece on her in retirement. She was very subdued, sort of sad and sort of lonely. Her sister lived in a house on the same compound, but it was just her. But she really perked up when she was showing me her actually perfectly spectacular carving. She carved on cedar boards and they were quite lovely.”

DAVID AMMONS was a longtime reporter for the Associated Press in Olympia. He later worked for the Secretary of State’s Office and is currently Chair of the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission.

“By the time of her re-election bid in 1980 I think the voters had pretty well decided the cut of the woman and just decided she wasn’t up to it. The initial sort of charm wears off really quickly in the first year and then the more she got in fights with the legislature and didn’t have a session that year, and just the continuing rumble of stories out of Olympia was that she wasn’t up to [the job]. It’s kind of a contact sport in Olympia, and she was used to being the professor who wasn’t questioned and the head of the classroom. And I think that’s one of the reasons she didn’t get along with the press because we ask impertinent questions or at least [skirty] questions. We questioned her... that was our role, and she didn’t quite understand that and thought we were just, you know, unspeakable cretins. And so I just think [the Democratic establishment] were ginning for her. They ganged up on her at the State Democratic Convention out in Hoquiam [in 1980], and Senator [Warren G.] Magnuson made it very clear that the party shouldn’t back her for reelection, and they cheered Jim McDermott who was there. She got stomped on by McDermott. And, of course, then he went on to lose to John Spellman.”
RESTRICTION-FREE WASHINGTON HISTORY TRAVEL?

With many museums and other heritage attractions closed temporarily because of the pandemic, Washingtonians in search of places to visit that offer a chance to come face-to-face with history—and that present little to no risk of virus spread—may want to consider some easy options for virtual and actual local heritage tourism.

VIRTUAL HERITAGE TOURISM

For armchair travelers, a click on the Revisiting Washington website (www.revisitingw.org) serves up a series of interactive tours based on the 1941 WPA-produced book Washington: A Guide to the Evergreen State. Revisiting Washington, a joint project of the Washington State Historical Society and the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, is meant to be used on a smartphone while driving the highways and byways, but the virtual journey and rich assortment of photos and other information is also worth a look.

SOCIALLY DISTANCED HERITAGE TOURISM

For those eager to get out and about without contributing to the possible virus spread, there are several outdoor locations close to home, no matter where you may live in the Evergreen State.

Bridges of Many Counties

Washington is home to hundreds of bridges over rivers, streams, ravines, canyons and lakes. From the iconic Deception Pass Bridge to short concrete spans over placid brooks, the social, cultural and engineering history of the state is on display year-round, 24 hours a day. Many offer windshield views while being crossed, some have parking areas nearby to better facilitate visits. Deception Pass Bridge—connecting Whidbey Island to Fidalgo Island—is even pedestrian friendly, for an exhilarating walk over the swirling currents far below.

Cemeteries

In earlier times, it wasn’t unusual for families to gather regularly in cemeteries for picnics and other weekend recreational outings. In this modern age, cemetery visits are not so common, but still offer even the casual visitor a chance to glimpse ornate monuments and, oftentimes, lush greenery. Some favorites include Claquato Cemetery in Lewis County, Comet Lodge Cemetery in Seattle and St. Patrick’s Cemetery, just off Interstate 5 near Kent. You can even make a cemetery road trip to honor suffragists buried across Washington during this suffrage centennial year, see “Here Lies a Suffragist,” page 23.

AMERICAN AHA Seattle HISTORICAL Meeting Moved ASSOCIATION Online

The American Historical Association (AHA) was scheduled to hold its annual meeting in Seattle in early January 2021, but the event has been moved online because of the pandemic.

In an announcement, AHA Executive Director James Grossman wrote, “After careful deliberation, the American Historical Association has determined that it will be impossible to hold the annual meeting in Seattle from January 7 – 10, 2021, as originally planned. The best available information from public health authorities and medical experts...suggests that the global health crisis will not be sufficiently resolved by January.”

“While we can’t be together in Seattle,” Grossman continued, “we will find ways to take advantage of the exciting program [the organizers] have developed. We hope that you stay safe and healthy in these difficult times, and look forward to sharing more information in the coming weeks.”

For the latest on the AHA annual meeting:
www.historians.org

Abandoned Infrastructure

In the past, it was sometimes easier or more expedient to leave pieces of infrastructure in place, even when that infrastructure was no longer in use. Some favorites in this category are old street railway tracks and traces of old tracks—bricked over decades ago yet still visible—on Spokane’s South Hill, particularly on Madison Street and Adams Street; and the 1912 ornate concrete overpass in Leschi Park in Seattle, built for the Yeader Cable Car that once connected downtown with an amusement area on Lake Washington. Oftentimes, finding other examples like this requires asking a local resident.

Virtual Heritage Tourism

Historical societies and public-sector heritage organizations have long relied on virtual tours and other programming to add value to their physical repositories. Now, during a pandemic, many historical societies and heritage nonprofits are expanding and adjusting their digital programming to reach more people with their collections.

Along the Waterfronts

Waterways have connected people and communities in what’s now Washington for millennia. Nowadays, public areas along saltwater harbors, riverfronts and freshwater lakes offer a mixture of wildlife, recreational areas and industrial activity. Favorites include Port Angeles on the Strait of Juan de Fuca, home to the M/V Coho ferry, which travels to Victoria, BC and back in nonpandemic times; Riverfront Park, an artifact of the EXPO ’74 World’s Fair in Spokane; a small cluster of working docks in Cathlamet on the lower Columbia River; and Memorial Park in Pateros along the Columbia in Okanogan County, where boaters once used cables to pull themselves upstream.

Columbia County Landmarks

Columbia County, where boaters once used cables to pull themselves upstream.

39 COUNTIES | Sharing heritage and history from communities around Washington and the Old Oregon Country.

Dams

Dams have “tamed” rivers and generated hydropower in Washington for well over a century, and many have been removed or reconsidered in recent decades for their effects on salmon and other wildlife.

While many larger dams always have only limited visitor access, viewpoints open year-round along the Columbia and other rivers provide a chance to appreciate the scope and scale of some of the larger hydroelectric projects from a distance. Some dams are open to pedestrians and vehicles, including Diablo Dam on the Skagit River near Newhalem on Highway 20, and Upper Baker Dam, north of Concrete in Whatcom County.

Random Roadside Attractions

Nearly every community in Washington has something interesting and historic that’s worth the time to drive to and drive by. These include the Teapot Dome Gas Station in Zillah in Yakima County; the old coke ovens in Wilkeson in Pierce County; the Battle of Four Lakes monument, and an abandoned concrete overpass in Leshi Park in Seattle, built for the Yeader Cable Car that once connected downtown with an amusement area on Lake Washington. Oftentimes, finding other examples like this requires asking a local resident.

Other Places?

If you have favorite places to visit to explore Washington history—and that aren’t likely to be closed or restricted during a pandemic—please let us know by sending an email to editor.columbia@gmail.com. We’ll feature highlights in an upcoming issue of COLUMBIA.

39 COUNTIES | Sharing heritage and history from communities around Washington and the Old Oregon Country.
As Washingtonians struggle with the economic downturn of the COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals and businesses are relying on financial support from state and federal programs to get through the crisis.

When an earlier crisis struck 90 years ago, art and artists in regions around the United States were similarly boosted by federal support during the Great Depression and early years of World War II. As a recent exhibit at the Tacoma Art Museum (TAM) demonstrates, in the Pacific Northwest these relief efforts made an impact, and left a lasting, if sometimes hidden, legacy.

The exhibit is called Forgotten Stories: Northwest Public Art of the 1930s. Nearly all of the pieces in the show—and featured in this article—are loaned by institutions around the Northwest, including the Washington State Historical Society.

How were this diverse range of regional pieces originally created?

From December 1933 to June 1943, the federal government sponsored a unique set of programs to support artists and create public artworks. Americans were suffering under the Great Depression and millions were unemployed. In response, newly-inaugurated President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration created the New Deal—a host of programs designed to provide government jobs, from construction to office work. Through the advocacy of Eleanor Roosevelt and others, work for artists, musicians, actors, and writers was included, too. The addition of artists to this list was a radical decision for the time, since art making was not generally considered a profession by which someone could earn a daily living. For many artists, this new recognition and support was as critical as their weekly paycheck.

The federal effort included four programs for visual artists. The five-month-long Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) was launched in December 1933 to provide artworks to tax-supported institutions. Art was acquired through a mix of purchases, new commissions, and artist donations. Some artists also were assigned to the Civilian Conservation Corps camps to document activities. The Section of Fine Arts (Section) and Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) for the decoration of government buildings followed. They eventually became a single effort, running from late 1934 into 1943. The murals in post offices and courthouses are, perhaps, the best known works from these two programs.

The fourth and largest of the programs was the Federal Art Project (FAP) under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which began in August 1935 and officially ended in February 1943, though most funding was withdrawn by the middle of 1942. In addition to providing artworks to a variety of institutions, the FAP also established community art centers which offered classes, lectures, art making opportunities, and traveling exhibitions free to the public.

Together, these four programs employed tens of thousands of artists and resulted in the creation of more than a million works of art. The programs abruptly ended, however, when

This colorful mosaic mural is still located in the lobby of Bagley Hall on the University of Washington campus in Seattle. It took several years to complete because all 20 faculty members of the Chemistry Department had to agree on the design.


A common theme of works created for New Deal art projects was celebrating national strengths, such as America’s abundance of natural resources. The timber industry was a common subject in the Northwest.


Ralph Bishop was an architect and painter from Tacoma. He meticulously illustrated this map with depictions of early pioneer settlements, territories of Indigenous peoples, state landmarks, and other details. He created similar maps of Fort Nisqually and the state capitol.


Elizabeth Colborne was the foremost regional practitioner of color woodblock printing. She mastered the Japanese process of multi-block printing, as well as innovated new techniques.
the U.S. entered World War II. As a result of the rapid shutdown and the realities of wartime, many of the artworks and related records were lost or destroyed.

Because of this fragmented ending and spotty record-keeping, it was believed for decades that these programs had generated little activity in the Northwest. However, research now shows that over 600 artists were employed, more than two thousand objects were created, and hundreds of thousands of Northwest residents experienced or created their own original artworks.

The Public Works Art Project in Washington primarily benefited artists in Seattle, though it also reached a handful in Tacoma and Spokane. In these communities, a wide variety of activities were supported—as long as they benefited public institutions. Notably, numerous paintings and prints were allocated to government offices and to public schools, libraries, and universities.

Under both the Section and the Treasury Relief Art Project, artworks were commissioned for 18 post offices throughout Washington, primarily in smaller towns. Most are painted murals that celebrate local industries or illustrate stories about the founding of towns or important historical events in the area. Since the works were prominently placed in government facilities, program administrators carefully monitored subject and content to make sure that there was no anti-government imagery or anything that contradicted the myths supporting the colonizing of the West.

These works constitute what might be the most visible legacy of 1930s federal art programs, with most still in place today, and many which can be viewed during post office lobby hours. (See map on facing page).

As in other states, the Federal Art Project was the largest of the four federally funded art programs in Washington. It was slow to launch because of political infighting, but once underway, it blossomed rapidly. One notable aspect was the cohort of talented and innovative printmakers that it supported. A division known as the Graphic Arts Project was organized within the FAP specifically to support printmaking workshops in several locations across the country. At a workshop at the Seattle headquarters saw the artists involved creating a variety of exciting images and pioneering new approaches to traditional techniques.

Another highly successful element was the art center located in Spokane. The community art centers opened under the FAP were a key component in achieving the program’s goals of making art accessible to all through a variety of free classes and programs. They had a particularly impressive impact in the Northwest. There were three centers in Montana and three in Oregon, in addition to the location in Spokane, and together they hosted hundreds of thousands of visitors. During the first five months it was open, the Spokane Art Center at 106 North Monroe Street downtown saw more than 13,000 visitors.

In many ways, the New Deal art programs in the Northwest mirrored national trends, but there were also distinctive regional features, too. The most notable was the use of traditional craft materials such as wood, ceramic, glass, and wrought iron to create artworks. The artistic uses of these media have proved to be a lasting innovation in the art of the Northwest, particularly glass and ceramics, and have been critical to the development of contemporary art forms regionally and nationally.

The federal art projects aspired to use art to boost public morale during a difficult time, and strengthened community ties by celebrating shared cultural interests. Artists often were instructed to emphasize subjects that highlighted past progress, celebrated American strength and determination, and outlined rosy visions for the future. However, though one of the stated goals of the government art projects was art that included and reflected all Americans, the projects’ designers and a number of administrators supported widespread policies of racism and exclusion. For African Americans, opportunities for artists were limited outside a few East Coast cities; and programs and classes at art centers were usually segregated. Other artists of color were also rarely hired. In the Northwest, only 12 such artists have been identified so far among the more than 600 people employed.

The New Deal art programs had a significant impact on the art history of the Northwest and there is much still to be discovered and understood. As Americans look ahead to an era of post-pandemic recovery and think about addressing the needs of artists in our current times, the 1930s programs also offer an instructive case study on the roles, possibilities—and sometimes the misuses—of government-sponsored public art.

For more information about the Tacoma Art Museum, visit tacomaartmuseum.org.  


ABOVE: The model of Diablo Dam in the North Cascades. The model, which was 51 feet wide and 8 feet long, weighed close to 1,500 pounds and included a working river supplied by a hidden water tank. Image courtesy Robert Bruce Inverarity Papers, circa 1840s–1997, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
Nettie Craig was born on July 15th, 1865 in Leavenworth, Kansas. Her father was a plantation owner named William Wallingford, and her mother, Violet Craig, was enslaved on his plantation. Nettie was one of six children, the youngest and the only one born free. From a very early age, Nettie proved to be bright and talented. She took to music readily, and was taking piano lessons as early as age 8. She also demonstrated leadership qualities and an interest in social justice at an unusually early age. She was only thirteen years old when, inspired by a speech by Susan B. Anthony, she became secretary of a local club honoring the social reformer and women’s rights activist—a club that was working in support of women’s suffrage.

It was a rarity at the time for any woman—let alone a woman of color—to attend and to graduate from college. Nettie took advantage of the free tuition offered at the time at the University of Kansas, earning her undergraduate degree there before moving on to the Kansas Conservatory of Music and Elocution, where she earned a Doctorate of Music on June 12, 1883—just a month shy of her eighteenth birthday. Nettie Craig was one of the first Black women to receive a PhD.

After her education, Nettie went on to teach music and to perform in traveling choirs. It was around this time that she married Albert Jones, her first husband, and moved with him in 1890 to Seattle where that city’s tragic fire of 1889 had created a boom of rebuilding. It didn’t take long for Nettie to find a place for her talents, becoming an organist and then music director for the First African Methodist Church. But her time in Seattle would not last long. Albert died in 1893, and Nettie moved to Tacoma, Washington in the same year, after a brief return to Kansas City.

It is in Tacoma where Nettie met and married her second husband, Henry Asberry. Henry was an established and successful businessman who ran the barber shop of the popular Tacoma Hotel. His was considered to be the best shave in town, and his client list reads like a “who’s who” of influential visitors to Tacoma: Calvin Coolidge, William C. Coolidge, William
activism and improving the sociopolitical status of women and Black people in society. The Washington State Federation of Colored Women was created in 1917 to bring these clubs together from as far away as Idaho and British Columbia. Nettie became its president.

In addition to her ongoing efforts toward women's rights, Nettie helped to establish the Tacoma Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1913—the first to open west of the Rockies. She was increasingly outspoken on all matters of racial discrimination, starting letter-writing campaigns to newspapers protesting the unjust practices she witnessed in her community. Her activism became legendary through several highly visible actions, including writing to the press to protest the movie Birth of a Nation, which portrayed freed Blacks as depraved and a threat to white people. She also organized protests against segregation practices at Fort Lewis and at businesses in the area.

By the time Nettie Craig Asberry died in 1968—at the incredible age of 103—she had become a celebrated and beloved Tacoma icon. To honor her lifelong efforts toward equality and social justice, Tacoma created the Nettie Asberry Cultural Club, a version of which still exists today. And in the year following her death, Mayor A. L. Rasmussen proclaimed that May 11, 1969 would be known in Tacoma as Dr. Nettie Asberry Day.

* * * *

The plot map proves helpful, and I am soon standing over a modest, worn stone, adorned with dried moss and bearing only the scantest of information: Nettie C. Asberry, July 15, 1865—November 17, 1968. Given all that Nettie accomplished in her lifetime, it feels sadly underwhelming. To a passerby, her grave looks like any other, offering no clues at all to the many significant accomplishments achieved in that dash between the dates. To remedy this—at least temporarily—I’m leaving flowers and a card which tells of her place in history and her contributions to the rights of women. Perhaps now, as we celebrate the centennial of the 19th Amendment granting women the hard-won right to vote, a passerby will read it and give proper thanks to a brave activist who helped make that possible.

Nettie Asberry is one of hundreds of Washington women whose tireless efforts helped secure women’s voting rights. The National Women’s History Alliance project “Here Lies a Suffragist” encourages people around the state to locate the graves of suffragists and to honor them by leaving a remembrance. If you would like to find a suffragist near you, please visit NationalWomensHistoryAlliance.org or Suffrage100WA.com.

Rockefeller, Mark Twain and Joaquin Miller to name a few. Tacoma is also where Nettie’s activism really started to flourish.

In the early 1900s, women’s clubs were growing in popularity across the country, in large part due to the women’s suffrage movement. Women in communities everywhere were coming together to join forces and be heard in their communities on a variety of subjects and issues, some with political themes and some as seemingly innocuous as sewing groups. Nettie became very interested in this idea, and traveled across the state of Washington, encouraging women of color to form their own clubs in their communities on a variety of subjects and issues. Nettie became very interested in this idea, and traveled across the state of Washington, encouraging women of color to form their own clubs in their communities on a variety of subjects and issues. Nettie became very interested in this idea, and traveled across the state of Washington, encouraging women of color to form their own clubs in their communities on a variety of subjects and issues. Nettie became very interested in this idea, and traveled across the state of Washington, encouraging women of color to form their own clubs in their communities on a variety of subjects and issues. Nettie became very interested in this idea, and traveled across the state of Washington, encouraging women of color to form their own clubs in their communities on a variety of subjects and issues. Nettie became very interested in this idea, and traveled across the state of Washington, encouraging women of color to form their own clubs in their communities on a variety of subjects and issues.
For families and others learning from a distance:

**Turn Your Home Into a History Lab!**

By Molly Wilmoth, Lead Program Manager
Washington State Historical Society

**HISTORIANS AND OTHER MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS**, including the team at the Washington State History Museum, use items from collections to learn about the past. To better understand Pacific Northwest history, we carefully review artifacts, ephemera, images, diaries, personal accounts, and maps through a process known as Object Analysis. Approaching objects using this method of inquiry allows us to build on prior knowledge while also maintaining an open mind to learn more or to adjust our previous understanding. It’s part of how museums, exhibits and research about the past continue to change, evolve and remain dynamic over time.

You and your family can practice Object Analysis with the photograph at the top of this page, using the guiding questions provided below:

**Observation:** What do you see in the photograph at the top, right-hand of the page? Think about people, objects, or activities you can observe.

**Inference:** When, where, and why do you think this photograph was taken? What do you think the people are doing? Have you seen anything similar before? Use your observations and prior knowledge to help you guess.

**Inquiry:** What would you still like to know about the photograph? What is left unanswered from your observations and prior knowledge?

**Extension:** Why would the Washington State Historical Society or another history museum want this photograph in their collection? Whose viewpoint does the photograph represent? Who might find it historically significant?

**What We Know**

After doing your own Object Analysis, you may be wondering what the Washington State Historical Society’s collections team knows about this image. This glass-plate photograph, titled “From top: 1943.42.13845, 2013.170.1, 1943.42.441. All images courtesy of Washington State Historical Society.”

From top: 1943.42.13845, 2013.170.1, 1943.42.441. All images courtesy of Washington State Historical Society.
The pandemic has caused hardships for everyone, and the history community is no exception. As this issue of COLUMBIA is going to press, countless museums remain closed and most archives are still off limits. And while many bookstores in Washington are now open with at least limited hours, there were several months beginning in the late winter that began with abrupt closures, followed by cancellations of readings and other long-planned author events.

In the middle of all this, publishers of Pacific Northwest history moved forward with scheduled releases of books that were years in the making. But with COVID-19 news dominating the airwaves – and with many of us distracted by the realities of life under lockdown – the publishers, and those authors and titles, didn’t receive the attention we feel they deserve. And the years in the making. But with COVID-19 news dominating the airwaves – and with many of us distracted by the realities of life under lockdown – the publishers, and those authors and titles, didn’t receive the attention we feel they deserve. And the reading public missed out on opportunities to meet the authors and to purchase new books.

With these realities in mind, COLUMBIA prepared this round-up of recent titles related to Pacific Northwest history that may have escaped your notice. Ask for them at your favorite local bookseller, and please “buy local” whenever you can!

**ICYMI: PUBLISHING NORTHWEST HISTORY DURING THE PANDEMIC**

The Duwamish River in Seattle has been home to Indigenous settlers. Bullert’s account of the river’s long history, and its near invisibility to so many modern Seattleites, gives this oft-overlooked body of water its long-overdue biography.

**Lost Literary Legacy**

By BJ Bullert

The Duwamish River in Seattle has been home to Indigenous settlers. Bullert’s account of the river’s long history, and its near invisibility to so many modern Seattleites, gives this oft-overlooked body of water its long-overdue biography.

**Salmon Eaters to Sagebrushers: Washington’s Lost Literary Legacy**

By Peter Donahue

Washington State University Press

Peter Donahue’s “Retro Reviews” column was a fixture in COLUMBIA for many years, and those columns form the basis for this compendium of writer profiles, along with fascinating facts about their novels and poems from the Evergreen State’s literary past.

**Saving the Oregon Trail: Ezra Meeker’s Last Grand Quest**

By Dennis M. Larsen

Washington State University Press

No one person better bridged the gap between 19th century settlers and the generation that came of age in the Pacific Northwest in the early 20th century than Ezra Meeker. Dennis M. Larsen recounts the story of Meeker’s original Oregon Trail journey in the 1850s, as well as his re-creation and commemoration a half-century later.

**The River That Made Seattle: A Human and Natural History of the Duwamish**

By BJ Bullert

University of Washington Press

The Duwamish River in Seattle has been home to Indigenous Duwamish people for millennia, and the original pre-industrial estuary drew some of Puget Sound’s earliest 19th century

settlers. Bullert’s account of the river’s long history, and its near invisibility to so many modern Seattleites, gives this oft-overlooked body of water its long-overdue biography.

**After The Blast: The Ecological Recovery of Mount St. Helens**

By Eric Wagner

University of Washington Press

It’s been 40 years since Mount St. Helens’ deadly and devastating eruption. In After The Blast, Eric Wagner describes how the area around the still-active volcano continues to surprise the scientists who’ve been studying the natural area as it continues to recover from the blast.

**Unsettled Ground: The Whitman Massacre and Its Shifting Legacy in the American West**

By Cassandra Tate

Available November 17, 2020

Sasquatch Books

The story of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and the Cayuse among whom they lived—and ultimately died—has been used, and often distorted, for political purposes almost from the moment it became widely known. In this multivariant book, Cassandra Tate gives this story from the 1830s and 1840s—and its continued aftermath—the thorough and thoughtful consideration it has long deserved.

**The Klondike Gold Rush Steamers: A History of Yukon River Steam Navigation**

By Robert D. Turner

Harbour Publishing

Yukon River steamboats played a key and sometimes dramatic role in the Klondike Gold Rush, and their history is inextricably tied with the economic rise of the Pacific Northwest more than a century ago. Robert D. Turner’s latest book goes beyond these “golden years” to document the final chapter of the steamer era, too. Featuring more than 600 photos.

**Legacies of the Manhattan Project: Reflections on 75 Years of a Nuclear World**

Edited by Michael Mays

Washington State University Press

This second volume of WSU Press’s Hanford History Series presents essays from the March 2017 Hanford History Project conference. Topics include range from print journalism to environmental cleanup, and even include Hanford kimchi. 

**Facing the World: Defense Spending and International Trade in the Pacific Northwest Since World War II**

By Christopher P. Foss

Oregon State University Press

World War II and then the Cold War injected massive amounts of federal money into the Pacific Northwest, transforming the economies and cultures of what had been “thirsty populated economic backwaters.” Christopher P. Foss presents essays from the March 2017 Hanford History Project conference.

**The Port of Missing Men: Billy Gohl, Labor, and Brutal Times in the Pacific Northwest**

By Aaron Goings

University of Washington Press

The murky waters around Aberdeen were home in the early 20th century to the “floater fleet”—a nickname given the numerous dead bodies that would surface with disturbing regularity. Aaron Goings explores the legend of the killer known as the “Ghost of Grays Harbor,” and the complex real-life character of Billy Gohl.

**The Apocalypse Factory: Plutonium and the Making of the Atomic Age**

By Steve Olson

The Port of Missing Men: Billy Gohl, Labor, and Brutal Times in the Pacific Northwest

Since World War II and then the Cold War injected massive amounts of federal money into the Pacific Northwest, transforming the economies and cultures of what had been “thirsty populated economic backwaters.” Christopher P. Foss presents essays from the March 2017 Hanford History Project conference.

**The Idaho Traveler**

By Alexandra Harmon

University of Washington Press

Alexandra Harmon explores Quinault, Suquamish, and other tribal history regarding regulatory power of tribes and inevitable collisions with legal systems outside reservation boundaries—which came into focus following the 1978 United States Supreme Court decision in Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe.

**The Roads of Idaho, and an earlier project in the 1970s to reclaim the Reservation: Histories of Indian Sovereignty Suppressed and Renewed**

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**Drake’s Fair & Good Bay**

By Melissa Darby

University of Utah Press

Did 16th century explorer Sir Francis Drake come ashore in a “Fair and Good Bay” in what’s now California or what’s now Oregon in 1579? Melissa Darby answers this question and others, and exposes an infamous and fascinating early 20th century history hoax along the way.

**Reclaiming the Reservation: Histories of Indian Sovereignty Suppressed and Renewed**

By Alexandra Harmon

University of Washington Press

Alexandra Harmon explores Quinault, Suquamish, and other tribal history regarding regulatory power of tribes and inevitable collisions with legal systems outside reservation boundaries—which came into focus following the 1978 United States Supreme Court decision in Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe.

**The Idaho Traveler**

By Alan Minkoff

Caxton Press

The roads of Idaho, and an earlier project in the 1970s to document the Gem State’s small towns, connect author Alan Minkoff to meaningful people and places that he revisits in this new volume.
This past summer marked the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. We didn’t want this important milestone to get lost in the pandemic. Ed Nolan shared this childhood memory of “VJ Day” in Tacoma.

VJ DAY: HAPPY PHOTOS AND BAD MEMORIES
Edward Nolan, Head of Special Collections

Washington State Historical Society

I don’t remember much about World War II. At five-going-on-six—and having only the radio to connect me to the wider world, I was much more interested in tuning in programs like The Great Gildersleeve or Fibber McGee and Molly. It was at a time when I learned life’s profound lessons—that I couldn’t have everything I wanted, and that all people died.

In 1945, we lived just off South Tacoma Way near 38th Street. Occasionally, my mother and I would make a trip to a nearby gas station where I would be treated to a bottle of strawberry pop. It seems that on each visit, I wanted the bottle cap for my collection. But the station owner absolutely refused to give me even one, as they were, he assured me, needed for the war effort. And I clearly remember April 12, 1945 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt died. I saw people crying, including my kindergarten teacher, which rather puzzled me. I walked home from school pondering this. When I arrived, I asked my mother, “Do people have to die?” And she simply replied, “Yes.” It was a lot to digest for a five-year-old.

Most of all, though, I remember VJ Day—"VJ" for victory in Japan—and I don’t remember much about World War II. At five—going on six—and remember not because it was a momentous day to be celebrated, but—when news reached the West Coast that World War II had ended. I

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Most of all, though, I remember VJ Day—“VJ” for victory in Japan—when news reached the West Coast that World War II had ended. I remember not because it was a momentous day to be celebrated, but because of the endless sound of sirens. As a child I was terrified by the sound of sirens, due in part, I suppose, to the many air raid alerts signaled by their mechanical wail. My mother was pregnant that summer with my brother—I desperately wanted a sister—and as his arrival became imminent, it was necessary for me to stay with my aunt in Lincoln Heights.

On VJ Day, we walked the mile or so from our house to hers and all the while the sirens screamed and screamed and screamed. I was traumatized, and couldn’t join in the joy and celebration sweeping over the city and country. I’m told it was a great day; there were parades, celebrations, and showers of confetti everywhere. But I spent the day cowering in my aunt’s house. My brother was born a few days later.

Several homes in Tacoma are visible sitting by open windows looking down at the street. Washington State Historical Society, 1974.64.13.

In the late 19th century, Grose was, according to BlackPast.org, “one of the founders of First African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Seattle [and] was a generous supporter of African American causes [and] a friendly and respected neighbor in pioneer Seattle.”

BHS traces its roots to the Bicentennial era more than 40 years ago. The first meeting of the committee that was to become the Black Heritage Society of Washington State was held at the home of Esther and Donald Mumford on March 20, 1977. The general purpose was the mutual interest to preserve the history and art of Black people of Washington State. Discussions at the Mumford home that long-ago evening concerned the geographic scope, fundraising, collecting artifacts and ephemera, protection of donations, location of a museum and informing the public about the new group’s efforts.

The founders didn’t delay, and an exhibition entitled A Portion of a Populor Museum of Black History and Art was presented in Seattle in September 1977. Over the past four decades, BHS has continued to collect and preserve historic materials, and to produce exhibits and other events related to Black history in the Evergreen State. Since the 1990s, we’ve stored our collection in the climate-controlled archives of the Museum of History & Industry (MOHAI) in Seattle, and we partner with MOHAI on exhibitions and public programming.

For more information about the Black Heritage Society of Washington State, please visit bhswa.org.

The common thread connecting these vintage photographs is William Grose, an early Black resident of Seattle whose spirit and legacy have recently returned to the fore. Grose is the proposed namesake for a community technology center to be housed in historic Fire Station Six in Seattle’s Central Area. The center is a project of the nonprofit Africatown Community Land Trust, and the naming is a fitting tribute to Grose, who operated several businesses and acquired a substantial real estate in Seattle during the late 19th century.

One of the Black Heritage Society’s early projects was to lead the effort in 1983 to name a park in Seattle’s Madison Valley for Grose, and it’s gratifying to see other organizations recognize his business accomplishments and community contributions. In addition to his success as an entrepreneur, Grose was, according to BlackPast.org, “one of the founders of First African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Seattle [and] was a generous supporter of African American causes [and] a friendly and respected neighbor in pioneer Seattle.”

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SHINING LIGHT ON VARDIS FISHER: IDAHO’S PROLIFIC AND PERPLEXING AUTHOR

By HannaLore Hein, Idaho State Historian

Several historic literary figures come to mind when people think about Idaho: Ernest Hemingway, who lived and died in Sun Valley; Ezra Pound, who was born in Hailey, Idaho; and Mary Hallock Foote, whose words and illustrations provided a glimpse into the seemingly exotic and unusual existence of a woman in the American West. But few people today seem to include one of Idaho’s most prolific writers—Vardis Fisher—in this crowd of literary giants.

Vardis Fisher published his first literary work in 1898, and over the course of his career he produced nearly forty books. His works of fiction incorporated imagery and symbolism of the American West and included myriad short stories and historical novels. He also contributed pieces to the genre of non-fiction that today paint a vivid picture of Idaho during the 1930s. Additionally, located in archival collections across the country are a few gems of his writing of historical novels far beyond the borders of the region in which he worked so skillfully and creatively for more than four decades.

In 1926, Fisher committed suicide at his Hagerman Valley home. At the time of Fisher’s death, Merle Wells, then Idaho’s State Historian, noted that Fisher’s “combination of historical and literary talent left a major impact upon the writing of historical novels far beyond the borders of the region in which he worked so skilfully and creatively for more than four decades.” Fisher’s legacy was indeed significant, and it is therefore my hope that the words of this Idaho State Historian, will encourage you to pick up a “Fisher”—fiction or non-fiction—and get lost in the facts and details that made his writing so remarkable.

TOP: A publicity or book jacket photo of Vardis Fisher from the height of his career.
CENTER: Vardis signing a copy of one of his books in the 1960s.
LEFT: Vardis Fisher wrote Idaho: A Guide in Word and Picture in the 1930s with support from the Works Progress Administration.
BOTTOM RIGHT: Two of Idaho writer Vardis Fisher’s better known novels are Mountain Man and Children of God.

All images courtesy Idaho State Historical Society.

served as the Idaho director of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Writers Project and ensured, thanks to his close relationship with James H. Gibson, owner of Caxton Printers in Caldwell, Idaho, that his Idaho: A Guide in Word and Picture became the first WPA state guidebook published in the United States. This book became the model for all other guidebooks created under the WPA program. Following this work, he again dedicated himself to his own writings, producing (among other works) Caxton Printers in Idaho (1944), God or Caesar (1953), and Mountain Man (1965). Director Sydney Pollack and Robert Redford made this last story famous in the 1972 film Jeremiah Johnson.

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Creating Hanford by C. Mark Smith

a cold, clear day in late December 1942, Colonel Franklin T. “Fritz” Matthias and two engineers from chemical giant DuPont discovered what they had been looking for: a place to build the massive facilities required for a critical part of the Manhattan Project, the American effort to build and deploy an atomic bomb. Matthias and his team explored eleven sites in four western states. The site they chose was a 650-square-mile tract of land—almost half the size of Rhode Island—of semi-desert shrub-steppe located at the foot of the Columbia River in southeastern Washington.

In 1942, about 1,500 people lived in the area on scattered farmland and ranches and in three tiny towns, including White Bluffs, Richland and Hanford. Because the Manhattan Project was of utmost importance, the town and people were of little concern. The almost unlimited supply of water from the Columbia River and vast amount of electric power from the recently completed Grand Coulee Dam sealed the decision.

They named the facility Hanford Engineer Works (HEW) after the small town of Hanford, population approximately 250. It was top secret at the time, but HEW was to be a massive manufacturing complex designed to produce a single product—plutonium.

The town was raped for way to make because the sprawling construction settlement called Hanford Camp. By the end of 1945, DuPont and 51,000 people had built three nuclear reactors, two chemical separation plants and 556 other buildings as well as Richland Village, which housed 16,000 of the workers and their family members. Seventy-five years ago this past summer, plutonium from Hanford’s historic B Reactor was used to fuel the atomic bomb that was tested at Trinity, New Mexico on July 16, 1945 and then, the “Little Boy” bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945.

Hanford’s origins date to 1907, when the town was platted by a group of like to share with COLUMBIA readers? Please send email to editor.columbia@gmail.com.
Check for exhibition opening and program dates: www.WashingtonHistory.org/VotesForWomen