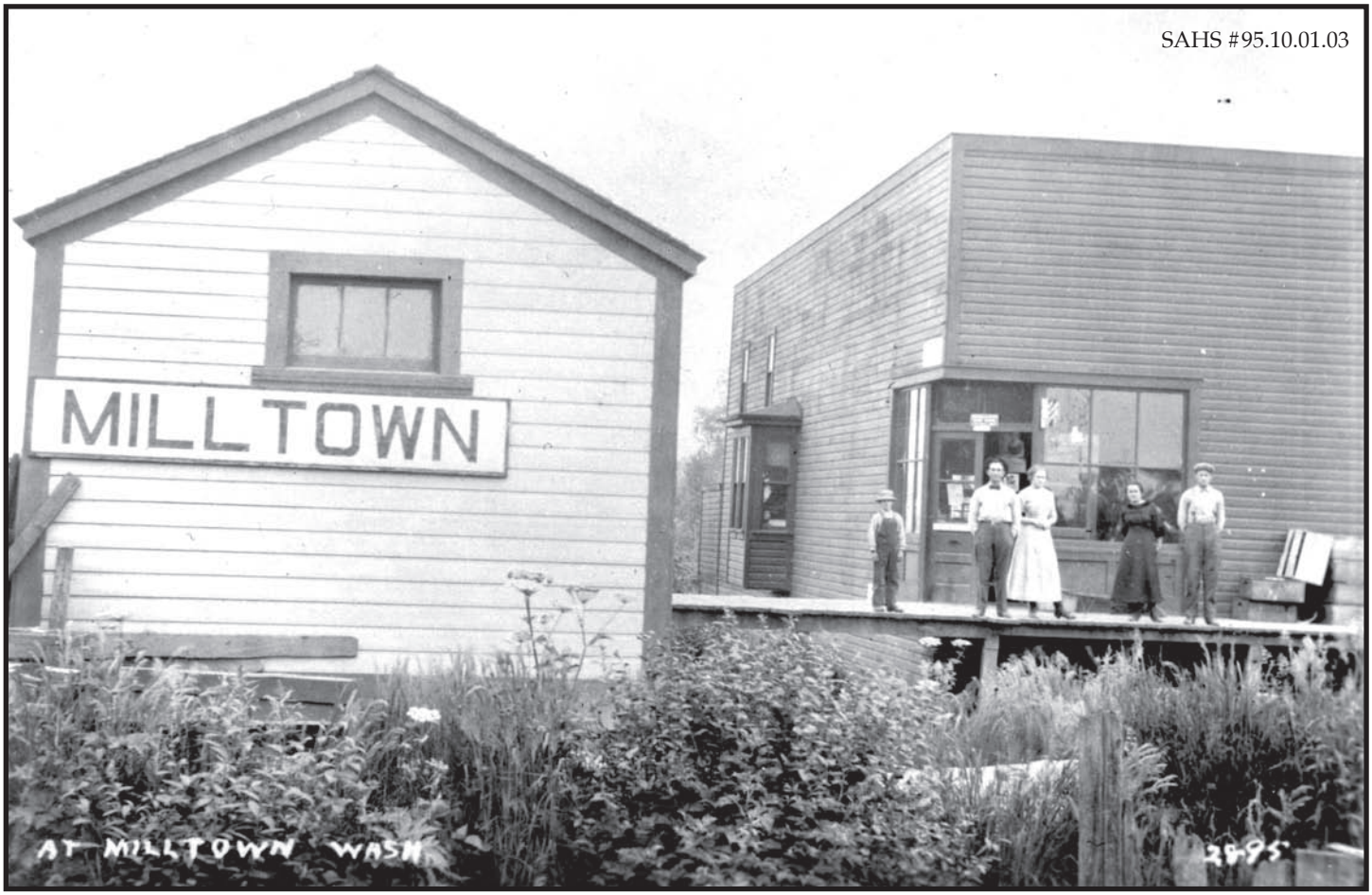
Stanwood Area ECHOES

Newsletter of the Stanwood Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 69
27108 102nd Ave NW
Stanwood, WA 98292
www.sahs-fncc.org

Stanwood Area Echoes **Issue No. 51 : Summer, 2016**

Mrs. Bonser's Milltown Store and Post Office

SAHS #95.10.01.03



MILLTOWN, WA ca. 1910 -- Milltown's location was a railroad mail stop, three miles north of Stanwood. The E. G. English Lumber Company along with many others, operated a large logging operation in the area. Mrs. Bonser, the wife of one of the mill owners, ran the grocery store between the railroad tracks and the Tom Moore Slough. She also ran the Post Office located in the store. It was a meeting and visiting place in the evening, while people waited for the mail train. The store closed in 1920 and the Post Office moved across the highway to the Milltown Trading Co.

History from Grace Rolfson and others - Compiled by Karen Prasse

(Read more about the Bonser family on page 4)

Message From The President

Dear Members and Friends:

Although the weather has been pretty spotty this summer, we have kept busy at the Historical Society. Even though we had to change plans at the last minute and move inside for festivities on the Fourth of July, we still had one of the largest parades we can remember. As you can tell from the pictures in the Newsletter, there were lots of people and wonderful costumes. Children enjoyed popsicles and games after the parade, and there were many people taking tours of the various exhibits. Of course, it wouldn't have been the Fourth of July in Stanwood without ice cream, strawberries, cupcakes and lemonade in the Floyd! People enjoyed the good food while they looked at the marvelous display of Hero Quilts. The quilts were beautiful, and the letters from those receiving them were very inspirational. Many thanks to the wonderful ladies who sew these quilts for our injured servicemen and women.

If you have stopped by the Tolin House since the beginning of July, you have noticed a (sort of) new face. Diane Anderson, former president of the society, is our new business manager, She will be handling the business aspects of the society which Janet Utgard had been doing for the last few years. Janet is now "retired" from that job, and we thank her for all the help she has given us, but I am sure she will still be around for our activities. Meanwhile, we welcome Diane back to a more active role; stop by and say hello to her.

We finished our popular History and Hors d'oeuvres series in May with a great program by Chuck Fowler on sailing ships in Puget Sound. Penny Buse has done such a wonderful job arranging these programs; we are looking forward to starting them again on Sunday, September 18. However, this time we are combining it with another special occasion. We used a grant from the Snohomish County Heritage Commission to improve the upstairs of the Museum building , and we will be hosting a an Open House for everyone to see these improvements. The Open House will begin at 1:00 pm, followed by refreshments and the first "H and H" of the year in the Floyd. We hope everyone will come to the museum to see the improvements, and stay for the "H and H" presentation and some great food.

We still need volunteers, especially to act as docents. You don't have to know a lot about Stanwood history to be a docent. We will train you! Also, mark your calendars for September 22, our annual general membership meeting and election of officers. We will begin with a barbeque at 6:00 pm and follow with a business meeting and election. Hope to see many of you there.

Sincerely,
Gail Ryer, President
Stanwood Area Historical Society

Stanwood Area Historical Society
January 1, 2016

OFFICERS		TERM (2Yr)
President	Gail Ryer	2015-2016
Vice President	Dan Lien	2016-2017
Recording Secretary	John Smistad	2015-2016
Corresponding Secretary	Margaret Utgard	2016-2017
Treasurer	Dave Eldridge	2016-2017
Past President	Larry Lien	

TRUSTEES	TERM (3Yr)
Penny Buse	2016-2018
Louis Stangeland	2016-2018
Janet Mayer	2014-2016
Sandy Robinson	2014-2016
Margaret Utgard	2015-2017
Pat Bronson	2015-2017
Clifford Larson	2015-2017
Mary Margaret Haugen	2015-2017
Alex Gedstad	Honorary Trustee

Newsletter Editors Richard & Robin Hanks

Wonderful Fourth of July Celebration at The Floyd!

Dangerous Days in Milltown

Even as the 19th century faded into history, the northern region of the Puget Sound retained much of its frontier feeling—a place of great possibility for some but not without its dangers. The callous murder of a young man in the community of Milltown, in late summer of 1900, is evidence of the still untamed character of the area. Milltown, roughly four miles north of Stanwood, was located within easy reach of three shingle mills in the area. The English Logging Company transported their logs by rail from the eastern hills to Milltown where they were dumped into the Tom Moore Slough until milled. Spur lines of the Great Northern Railroad connected the mills to its main track which ran through the hamlet.

The Bonser family had moved to the Conway/Milltown area in 1890. The family patriarch, William, a blacksmith in Iowa, listed himself as a day laborer in Washington ten years later. Son George clerked for four years in Seattle before entering into a partnership with his father-in-law F.N. Hatch and starting the first shingle mill in Edmonds in 1895. They moved their enterprise to Skagit County in 1900 when George was 31 years old. In June of that year, his Skagit Bay Mill boasted manufacturing an estimated 80,000 cedar shingles a day and had orders running six months in advance. In February 1901 a post office was established at Milltown with George as its first postmaster.

The family also ran a small grocery in Milltown which was managed by George's younger brother Clarence Carl. Clarence, 14 years George's junior, assisted his brother as co-owner of the shingle mill which also employed their father William by 1910. A generation later Milltown resident Grace Rolfson recalled the comfortable warmth of the intimate little store with its ice cream parlor and potbellied stove where farmers, family and friends met and visited. There were always "plenty of chairs for people to sit on. The world problems were settled around that stove," Rolfson remembered. People often gathered to await the mail trains, north and south, as they made their runs in the early evening, with the bags of letters and news hurled from the moving cars as it rolled through the township. Milltown had its rough side, as well, said Rolfson. There were three saloons, a dance hall and a pool hall run by the Woodmen of the World catering to the many mill workers. George Bonser was a member of WOW's cousin organization, Woodmen of America.

Before migrating from Iowa William and his wife Anna had buried two sons and a daughter who, as toddlers, fell victim to the hardships of life on America's Great Plains. The death of 18-year-old Clarence, however, in August 1900 had no natural cause, but was the result of a vicious ambush. A little before nine p.m. on a Wednesday evening, Clarence closed his store and started on a short walk to a neighbor's farm for a pail of milk. After an absence of three hours George became concerned and hunted through the early morning looking for his brother. Seeking help, a search party was organized later that day. As they combed the area, George boarded the train to search nearby Stanwood. The gruesome truth, however, was found that afternoon when Clarence's battered body was located in the brush only 800 feet from his store. A club discovered nearby still held the bloody evidence of the savage beating which fractured Clarence's skull and took his life.

Local law enforcement believed the crime might have been the work of a roving band of thugs from the Fraser River district—"tough characters," as described in a local paper--who had looted a Lynden store earlier. Arrested in Mt. Vernon, seven of the men could not be tied to the Lynden theft. They were released but authorities placed them on the southbound freight train which ran by Milltown. It was felt that they jumped the train at the village and laid in wait to rob young Clarence. Skagit Sheriff Ed Wells vowed to bring the entire gang to justice. However, less than a month later newspapers reported a murder just outside of Wenatchee which closely mirrored the death of Clarence Bonser. The

Milltown storefronts and road looking east. ca.1910

brutally beaten but decomposing body of T. I. Shanley, a Seattle cook who traveled to Wenatchee for a new job, was discovered 100 yards from the Great Northern tracks. Police believed that the same "tramps" who, murdered Bonser, travelled east along the rail tracks to the Wenatchee area where they jumped Shanley.

The threats still lurking around Milltown were apparent in early June 1916. George Bonser awoke in his Milltown apartment and discovered that while he and his wife slept, an intruder had crept next to them, silently taking their jewelry and watches from their bedsides and quietly ransacking the post office downstairs in their Trading Union store. Luckily, besides the jewelry, only sixty dollars was missing and both George and wife Gertrude were unharmed. Things might have ended differently had Gertrude awakened and used the pistol she kept under her pillow.

By the time of the 1916 robbery, George was transitioning. He sold his shingle mill at Utsaladdy to O.C. Sorensen of Edmonds and organized the Stanwood Automobile Company in 1914. The new business stood on Main Street's west end, where he specialized in selling the Overland and Willys-Knight autos. He became its president and ran the operation until 1928 when he opened an appliance store in Stanwood. Gertrude Bonser kept up the little grocery and maintained the post office until the store closed in 1920. "That store burnt in the 1940s and that was the end of Milltown," said Rolfson.

In 1940, at the age of 71, George was employed as a night watchman for the Lien Bros. packing house. Gertrude died at the age of 78 in December 1947. Fifty-eight of those years were spent married to George. In the summer of 1951 ill health finally forced George to move south to live with his daughter Winona Smith in Los Angeles. There a stroke took him on December 31, 1952. A 1926 sketch of George Bonser said that he was a member of the "class of doers, gifted with initiative, energy and determination." Talents very much needed in the early days of Milltown.

by Richard Hanks

(Sources: William Whitfield, Snohomish County: An Illustrated History, 1926; Art Kimball and John Dean, Camano Island: Life and Times in Island Paradise; Interview with Grace Rolfson, Stanwood Area Historical Society, 1991; American Lumberman; Twin City News; Seattle Post-Intelligencer; San Francisco Call; Morning Olympian; Bonser Family history, Ancestry.com; Federal census and postal records)

Stanwood Area History

Museum

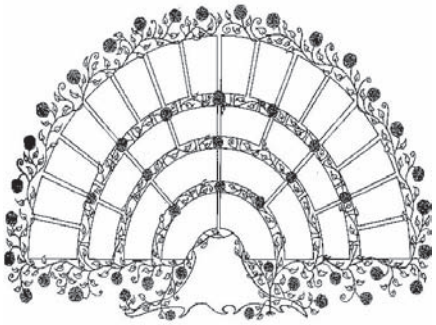
&

D.O. Pearson House

Operated By
Stanwood Area Historical Society
360-629-6110

HOURS BY APPOINTMENT

Wednesday	1pm	– 4pm
Friday	1pm	– 4pm
Sunday	1pm	– 4pm



Family History Researchers!

Camwood Genealogy Workshop meets the FIRST Monday of each month at 1 p.m. on the 2nd floor of the Stanwood Area History Museum.

For more information, call Bill Blandin, 360-387-3375

SAHS Board & Member Meetings - Fourth Tuesday afternoons at 4:00 pm in the second floor of the museum. Everyone is welcome!

On the left is Joan McKean and Mary Margaret Haugen. Mary Margaret again emceed our Spring Tea on Saturday, April 16th and did a fabulous job honoring Alice McKean Davison. Joan is Alice's niece by marriage and shared stories about her aunt.

The 2016 Stanwood Area Historical Society Tea Committee rose to the occasion and sold all the seats to this event, so mark your calendars and make your reservations early for next year at (360) 629-6110.

April 29, 2017 • 1:00pm
$20/person

Alice McKean Davison Honored at Our Spring Tea

Although educated in the fields of science, math and chemistry, Alice McKean Davison had a love of history, particularly for the area where she spent most of her life. During World War II she kept in communication with those students from Stanwood High School who served in the conflict and in 1972 she was one of the founding trustees of the Stanwood Area Historical Society.

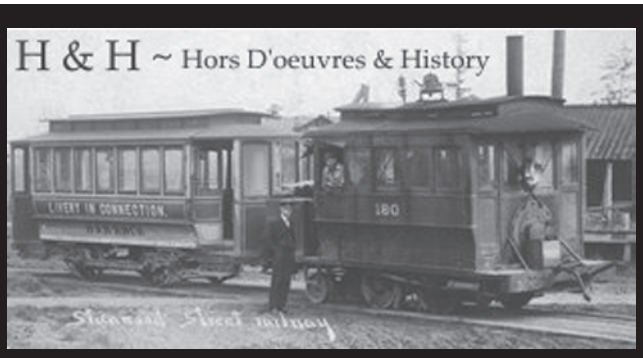
Her life was dedicated to education and she served in the Stanwood school systems for 42 years. She was principal of Stanwood High School for nearly 25 years. In 1950, however, she asked to be reassigned as a counselor telling the local newspaper that it seemed that in all her years as a principal, a counselor was what she really was.

Mrs. Davison was born December 2, 1898 on the McKean farm north of Stanwood. Her mother Annie Moore McKean and Aunt Lillian Keenan claimed to be the first white children born in Snohomish County. Her father Edmund moved to the area in 1890. Alice attended the local elementary school and graduated from Stanwood High School in 1916. She went on to graduate from Western State University in 1921 with a degree in Chemistry. After teaching the subject for a year at WSU, she accepted a position as a science and math instructor at Selah High School in central Washington for another two years. In 1923 she married Joseph Davison and the couple returned to Stanwood where Mrs. Davison joined the staff of Stanwood High School.

Alice Davison retired from her education duties in 1965 and planned to travel with her husband. Tragically, Joseph Davison died the next year. Six years later she helped organize the Stanwood Area Historical Society and in July of 1972 she became a founding trustee along with Erik Eide, Charles T. Cole, Marion Duff, Ed Iverson, Grace Cornwell and Maud Simonson (see below.)

Under President Cole, the group met in the Seattle-First National Bank building in Stanwood where they developed the articles of incorporation for the Society. In 1973 the SAHS succeeded in placing the family home of D. O. Pearson on the National Register of Historic Places. Three years following that achievement, Alice McKean Davison took ill and died on March 22, 1976. A devoted figure for educational growth in Stanwood, her accomplishments remain part of the town's character.

by Richard Hanks



At The Floyd

September 18th
Open House • 1 - 4 p.m.
History and Hors d'oeuvres
Norway Night • 4 - 6 p.m.

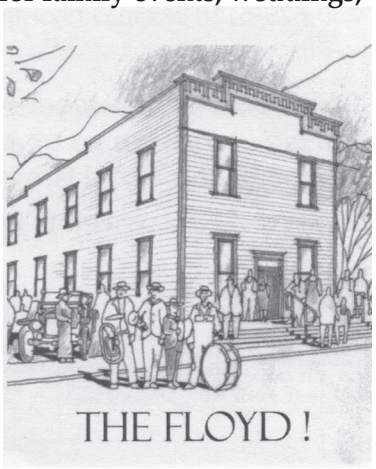
September 22nd • 6 p.m.
SAHS General Meeting & Election

October 16th • 4 - 6 p.m.
History and Hors d'oeuvres
Stillaguamish Tribe
Tamara Neuffer & Gloriana Tatro

Rent The Floyd

The Floyd Norgaard Cultural Center Public Hall is available for arts, music, theater, cultural events as well as a banquet hall for family events, weddings, reunions, birthdays, & business meetings. Call 360-629-6110 or www.sahs-fncc.org

Proceeds from rentals and events benefit the continuing preservationand rehabilitation of the Public Hall and SAHS educational and historical projects and programs.



SAHS Memorials & Donations

In Memory Of:
Aileen Lund - Laurie Ware
Diane Nielson - Dennis & Shirley Anderson
Diane Nielson - Janet Utgard
Jean Logan Kallock - Rose & Jerry King
Jean Logan Kallock - Margaret Utgard
Jean Logan Kallock - Floyd & Marilyn Templeton
Jean Logan Kallock - Marlen & Audrey Knutson
John Denby - Rose & Jerry King
Olive Gayle Hatton Schulz - Marion Traynor
Peggy Ramberget Nelson - Margaret Utgard
Randy Britch - Rose & Jerry King
Rella Wood Langland - Margaret Utgard
Rella Wood Langland - Elmer & Gladys Norgaard Trust

Donations:
Michael Heibnrich
Karen Pelletier
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GET INVOLVED...STAY IN TOUCH

The Stanwood Area Historical Society is a special place. It collects and conserves the wondrous treasures of history that define our community. Your participation would not only assist in this crucial protection of our past, but would make you part of our important work. You can make a difference. Join SAHS today!

Memberships are due annually in January. This is a significant means of support for the Society and now includes a subscription to the newsletter and ***10% off all publications, rental of The Floyd and special events*** *for most memberships*. SAHS is a tax-exempt non-profit organization and depends on gifts, bequests from individuals and groups, fundraising activities and membership dues for its financial support. Your contributions are tax deductible and will be used only for the preservation of the history of our area.*

[ ] Individual Membership: **$20.00**

[ ] Family Membership: **$25.00**

[ ] Student (Under 15) Membership: **$5.00***

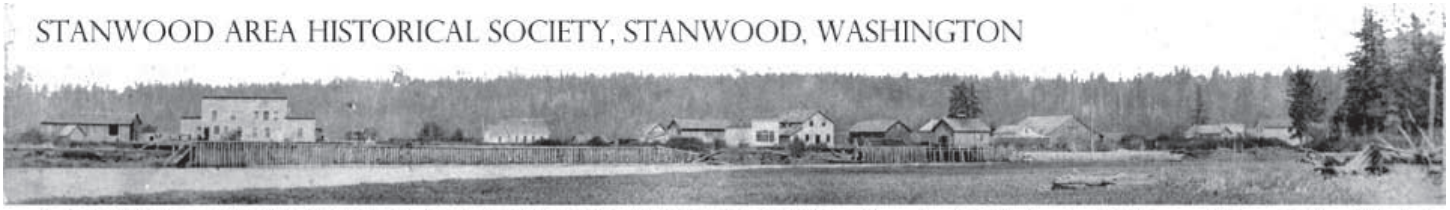
[ ] Lifetime Individual Membership (+65 yrs of age): **$100.00***

*(*Newsletter Only)*

Name [Please print] _____

Address _____ City _____State ___ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email_____



P. O. Box 69 ~~~ 27112 102nd Ave. N. W., Stanwood, Washington ~~~ www.sahs-fncc.org Photographer: G. D. Horton, circa 1886, Stanwood Stillaguamish River Waterfront

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