

Rainier Valley Heritage News



Volume 18, Issue 1

Winter 2009

President's Message

by Brian Fairchild

As we move into 2009, the RVHS Board will be sitting down together for a facilitated planning session on Saturday, March 7. Much has changed in our community since 2002 when we presented our last long-range plan, and more big changes are on the horizon. With Light Rail opening, many new residents are expected to move to the area in the next few years.

Our planning session will focus on maintaining our strong base of support among local businesses and current and former residents, while positioning ourselves to take advantage of new development by reaching out to newcomers who may not be familiar with the history of the Rainier Valley. We will also look at our strengths and weaknesses as an organization and consider ways to improve our operations going forward.

We are excited about this chance to work with a facilitator and to turn our ideas and dreams into an action plan!

Website Update

In January the Website Committee met with the folks from NPower who are building our new website. They showed us the site, which is coming together beautifully and gave us some basic training on how to add content. We plan to start adding articles, photographs, and virtual exhibits now, while the NPower staff are putting the finishing touches on the site for us. If anyone is interested in helping out, just let us know! This is something that would be easy to do at home, or anywhere with an internet connection. Thanks again to NPower, to Connie Cox, John Frank, and Mary Ann Schleer for all their help developing the site, and to 4Culture for funding the project.

CALENDAR

SAVE THE DATE!
RVHS Annual Meeting
Saturday, May 2
10:00 a.m. - Noon

Signs of Life in the Rainier Valley

If you've driven along Rainier Avenue to and from Renton lately, you may have noticed signs of life in the wooden two-story building at the entrance to Lakeridge Park, south of Rainier Beach. It's been empty for the past few years, but the upside down "Lakeside Tavern" sign made it something of a landmark long after the tavern closed.

Like any place occupied by humans, the history of this site is made up of many layers. Before the tavern's four-decade run, this was the Taylor Mill Grocery, originally the company store for the lumber mill across Rainier Avenue on Lake Washington. Now, with Vince Mottola's Pizzeria Pulcinella, which opened in December, a new layer of stories is being added to the site.

A Mill Town

In 1901 Sanford Taylor barged his milling equipment to this spot after his original mill at Leschi was destroyed. For 30 years Taylor's Mill processed logs from the hills above the mill (now Skyway) and other locations around Lake Washington. The lumber was shipped north to Seattle or south to Renton on the streetcar rails or delivered by horse and wagon to nearby construction sites. Most of the mill's 100 workers lived in company housing nearby. Their little community was anchored by the grocery store, which also served as post office, watering hole, and unofficial community center. The post office dubbed the community "Tamill"—a name that lives on, oddly enough, on Mapquest and Google maps, though not in local usage.

The canyon behind the building is officially Lakeridge Park but is more commonly known as "Dead Horse Canyon." Of the two competing explanations for this name, we prefer the one about the pet horse, beloved by pioneer children, who roamed the canyon until its "death and dehydration" in 1909. The other explanation—that a horse once fell to its death while pulling a load of lumber up the canyon road—strikes us as pedestrian, though perhaps a little more plausible. (If the horse was so dang beloved, why didn't someone get it some water?)

The mill operated into the 1930s. Whether it folded because the area had been logged off, or because demand for lumber dried up during the Great Depression, we're not sure.

Somehow the grocery store survived, and by 1937 a filling station out front served the automobile traffic that had replaced the streetcars along Rainier Avenue.

Favorite Watering Hole

In the 1950s the Lakeside Tavern opened in the old grocery, serving a mix of Boeing commuters and neighbors. One woman who grew up on the hill above the tavern thought it was a bank when she was a girl, "because that's where Dad went to cash his paychecks."

We're not sure when the upside down sign appeared, but we are told that the sign company was known for the churlish, yet undoubtedly satisfying, tactic of coming by in the middle of the night to flip over the signs of customers who hadn't paid their bills. The tavern owners apparently resigned themselves to this little oddity and eventually embraced it as part of the establishment's unique identity.

When the tavern closed, the Punsalan family, who owned the building, weren't sure what to do with it until their son approached them with a group of friends who wanted to buy it. That group consisted of Lloyd Laigo, Stephen Garcila, Anthony Fajarillo, Emmanuel Rivera, Alex Rolluda, and Rowen Punsalan. They mostly met while attending college at the University of Washington and either grew up in the Rainier Valley or currently have some strong tie to the area.

They had formed a company called Kamagon Associates, LLC (the name is a variation on Kamagong, a valuable hardwood native to the Philippines). They own several properties located mostly in South Seattle and became very excited at the prospect of redeveloping the Lakeside Tavern site. The initial project also included plans for the neighboring apartment building to the south, including daylighting Taylor's Creek which flows directly underneath the property.

Meanwhile, the old tavern sat empty, awaiting its next incarnation, or demolition, which was definitely on the table. The sign sagged; dust collected; paint peeled; graffiti appeared.

A Pizzeria Is Born

Enter Vince Mottola, proprietor of Vince's Italian Restaurants in Rainier Beach, Renton, Burien, and Federal Way. Vince had long been eyeing the old

Lakeside Tavern and approached the Kamagon group with his ideas to preserve it instead of leveling it.

"There were numerous businesses that were interested in the building," said Lloyd Laigo. "Some of them included a coffee shop, ethnic grocery store, hair and nail salon, and even a church. Quite frankly, none of them were able to really convince us that it wouldn't be better to tear it down and start fresh." After a few meetings with Vince to discuss his vision for a pizzeria, the fate of the structure was sealed. Added Laigo, "We are all regular customers at his restaurants and we knew that he would do something fabulous with the building and for the community."



And he has. This past December the Pizzeria Pulcinella opened its doors, serving delicious Neapolitan pizza in a cozy, elegant setting. The new venture is the brainchild of Vince Mottola and his

partners, Fred Martichuski and David Dorough.

So, to Taylor's Mill and the Lakeside Tavern, we can now add the stories of a group of Filipino developers and an Italian restaurateur. The Mottola family was part of a post-WWII wave of Italian immigration, not the turn-of-the-century immigrants who brought us the Pike Place Market, Borracchini's, Gai's Bakery, and "Garlic Gulch." Vince's parents, Vince Sr. (Enzo) and Ada Mottola, arrived from Naples in 1954 as newlyweds.

The Italians who arrived here in the 1950s were part of Seattle's Italian community, but some felt less of a connection to "Garlic Gulch" than they did to Italy itself. Vince Sr. returned to Italy frequently, and even moved the whole family back to Naples for a year and a half when Vince Jr. was twelve.

Vince Sr. opened the first Vince's Italian Restaurant at Othello and Empire Way (now Martin Luther King Jr. Way South) in 1957, and the menu reflected his commitment to authentic Italian cuisine, which sometimes outweighed his desire to please the customers. Vince had an espresso machine in the early 1970s, long before you could find lattes on every corner, and he served espresso as it was served in Italy.

"The customers were very upset," recalled Vince Jr. "This tiny little cup of coffee! And no refills! "But Vince didn't back down, and he felt the same way about the food.

Says the younger Vince, "In Italy, when you go to a restaurant, you go to experience their food, not tell them how to do it," said Vince Jr. "My father was proud of his traditional Italian food, and it was an insult to suggest that he make it more 'American.' The American perception is that garlic should be used heavily in Italian cooking. Yes, it's used in a lot of dishes, but it's just the essence of the garlic. It's used expertly and subtly."

People would sometimes request extra garlic at Vince's, but Vince Sr. imposed a limit. "Have you ever been to Italy?" Vince Sr. was known to say. "How would you know, then? These are our family recipes. If you don't like it, just leave."

Vince Jr. plans to continue the tradition of authentic Italian food at his new place (though perhaps not the combative customer service). He has imported a wood-fire pizza oven from Italy and plans to get certified by the Vera Pizza Napoletana Association.

"I really know what Neapolitan pizza should be like," Vince Jr. stated. "I've been eating it all my life!"

He'll also be serving Café d'Arte coffee, roasted to perfection by his friends the Cipollas, whose family also came to Seattle from Naples in the 1950s.

At a dry run party, my family and I looked around the restaurant at this remarkable gathering of Filipino families, proud investors, beaming restaurateurs, bustling wait staff, solemn baristas, and hipster chefs, and we couldn't help imagining that all of the Lakeside Tavern regulars and Taylor's Mill workers who once congregated here were crowded in with us too. All their stories were woven into the walls, giving the place a richness that made the delicious Neapolitan pizza taste even better.

And then, on the way out, we walked around to the south side of the building to check out Vince's charming tribute to the old Lakeside Tavern's delinquent sign bill. How lucky for Seattle that this special place has fallen into the hands of people who appreciate and honor its history.



Pizzeria Pulcinella
10003 Rainier Avenue South
Seattle, WA
206-772-6861

Project Updates

Time Capsule

Lauren Kelly applies label and opening instructions to Hillman City Time Capsule. The capsule is ready to be installed at the Rainier Avenue Church when their upcoming construction project gets going.



"Bringing World Religion Home" New School Project

Mikala spent much of the Fall accompanying 40 6th graders from The New School on a series of field trips to visit religious institutions in the Rainier Valley. The students took photographs and notes and recorded audio and video clips of their visits. In December, the students continued researching the different religions and wrote research papers for their teacher, Chris Quigley. Next, we will work with the kids to select text, photos, and audio/video clips for the website we are creating. We will also assist Mr. Quigley to document the project as a series of lesson plans which will be available to other teachers on the site. Thanks to the fabulous 6th graders, to the religious leaders who welcomed us into their places of worship, to teachers Chris Quigley, Bryan Street, Eric Jones, and Zoe Manzo, and to 4Culture for funding the project. We all learned a lot!



Segregation, Integration and Gentrification in Mount Baker:

A Brief History of Race in One Seattle Neighborhood

by Jesse Inman

One reason we work so hard to document and preserve the history of the Rainier Valley is so that researchers can have primary sources to work with. Over the years we have helped historians and students dig up information about the Jewish community in South Seattle, a 100-year-old murder on Mercer Island, and the presence of cows in urban environments in the early 20th century. Last spring we worked with Jesse Inman, a student at Western Washington University in Bellingham, who wanted to research the history of racial covenants in the Mount Baker neighborhood. Here are some excerpts from his paper.

Introduction

Mount Baker is a moderately sized residential neighborhood in Southeast Seattle settled between Rainier Valley to the west and Lake Washington to the east. The neighborhood boasts a geographic mix of parklands, lakefront, wooded hills, residential streets and unique 20th century architecture. One other feature that Mount Baker takes pride in is its ethnic diversity. According to the Mount Baker Community Club website, Mount Baker is a place with “people from ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds every bit as varied as the landscape.” This feature, however, has not been a long-standing characteristic of Mount Baker. In fact, for the first half of the neighborhood’s history, Mount Baker was an exclusively upper income and racially segregated neighborhood, and the community devoted a substantial amount of energy to making sure it stayed that way. So how did a neighborhood once known for its elitism and racial segregation become a neighborhood that now boasts ethnic diversity and social responsibility?

The history of Mount Baker neighborhood demonstrates on a neighborhood scale much of the racial politics as that were occurring in Seattle and across the nation in the 20th century. In the early 1900s the neighborhood was the site of one of the first successful legal challenges to neighborhood segregation in Seattle. The neighborhood was also swept up in the 1920s and ‘30s wave of anti-Japanese sentiment that was growing on the West Coast. In the 1960s the neighborhood, much like the rest of the nation, was forced to confront issues of racial integration and a younger generation who challenged traditional values such as racism and elitism. Now, as American cities like Seattle face new racial issues such as gentrification, the Mount Baker neighborhood continues to be affected by these issues. The history of Mount Baker is part of the broader history of race relations and civil rights in Seattle and demonstrates how racial politics of the 20th century played out on a neighborhood level.

Early Development in Mount Baker

[Around 1906] Daniel Jones and a group of associates formed the Hunter Tract Improvement Company and purchased 200 acres of Doc Maynard’s property for development. Jones’s plan was to create an exclusively upper-class residential community. To achieve this goal, Jones and the Hunter Tract Company would engage in the city’s earliest experiment in city planning. Working with the Dose family, Jones outlined a plan for a residential community with large houses centered around Mount Baker Park. The Dose family also helped establish the Mount Baker Park Improvement Club, one of the city’s first neighborhood associations. Jones also consulted with some of Seattle’s top architects in order to plan out a scenic landscape. This included the Olmsted Brothers who were famous for designing the earliest version of the Seattle parks. John Olmsted wrote Jones in 1904 and told him “the [Mount Baker] project as a whole is very intelligently conceived.” Olmsted did have one suggestion for Jones, that he employ the tactic of restrictive covenants in his deeds, which would outline property use violations that could result in the loss of property. Olmsted went on

to suggest a series of restrictions, such as a ban on selling liquor, requirements for the size of houses, a ban on renting houses to tenants, requirements that houses be at least 40 feet from the street and so on. If property owners were to violate these restrictions, their deed would be nullified and their property would return to the ownership of the Hunter Tract Company. Over the years, the Hunter Tract Company would develop a reputation for its use of these restrictive covenants to maintain the neighborhood's character.

Racial Segregation in Mount Baker

Olmsted did not recommend racial restrictions [in Mount Baker]. However, in the early 1900s, neighborhoods were increasingly adding restrictive covenants preventing non-Caucasians or specific races from purchasing homes. [Eventually] both the Dose and the Hunter Tract additions would include racial covenants in their deeds. [These restrictions were soon challenged.] In 1909, Suzie Stone, an African-American woman, purchased a tract of land in Mount Baker through the use of a white intermediary. The Hunter Tract Company sold the land "but afterwards sued to cancel the appointment on the ground that approval was made through mistake and without the knowledge that plaintiffs were colored persons." Mrs. Stone took the case to the Superior Court of King County. The issue was taken up by the Horace Cayton's *Seattle Republican*. In an article entitled "Another Phase of Negro Phobia," Cayton [asked], "must the constitution of the United States be broken in order to enhance the value of a few town lots?" Stone won her case in 1911 and began to build her home. She then went on to successfully sue the Hunter Tract Company for damages and was awarded \$525.

The failure to prevent Suzie Stone from purchasing a home did not stop the residents of Mount Baker from attempting to remain an exclusive neighborhood or from using race as a criterion for discrimination. But as the years

went on, the focus of the neighborhood's discrimination would shift. Of principal concern to residents was separating themselves from the communities that were developing below them in neighboring Rainier Valley. [The Italians of "Garlic Gulch" were accepted fairly easily into the community, but the Rainier Valley's small Japanese population was seen as a threat.]

In 1911, a 6-ton stone Japanese lantern, a gift from Kobe, Japan, was installed in Mount Baker Park. One might take this as a sign that the Mount Baker Community was going to be accepting of Japanese immigrants. However, following the First World War, there was growing anti-Japanese sentiment on the West Coast. In 1916, the Seattle Anti-Japanese League was founded by former Washington senator Miller Freeman. The League worked on restricting Japanese immigration and boycotting Japanese businesses. At the same time, groups such as the Seattle Ministerial Union and the First Presbyterian Church began working to speak on behalf of the Japanese community in Seattle.

In 1919, the Community Club met with Frank Kannair of the Anti-Japanese League and Reverend U.G. Murphy of the Seattle Ministerial Union. [*Ed Note: U.G. Murphy was the pastor at Columbia Congregational Church. He continued to support the Japanese community through WWII and its aftermath. There is a fishing pier in Seward Park named in his honor.*] Despite the objections of Rev. Murphy, the club voted to exclude Japanese-Americans from the neighborhood. The club would continue to focus on preventing Japanese-Americans from purchasing land throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In 1938, the Improvement Club became concerned about uses of Mount Baker Park by people from "non-adjacent areas" and, rather ironically, attempted to ban Japanese people from the very park where the Japanese lantern stood.

[To be continued in the next issue]

Treasurer's Report

Thanks to everyone who renewed their memberships and sent in donations for 2009—we appreciate your contribution to the preservation of Rainier Valley's history! If you haven't sent yours in, please do so now. In these tough economic times, our endowment has taken a hit, and grants will be harder to get as public funding for cultural organizations gets the axe. We need your financial support more than ever.

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Additions to Archives

08.31: Gary Gibbon donated a box of photographs, documents, and newspaper clippings from the Pritchard Beach neighborhood, Franklin High School, and other Rainier Valley locations. Also letters and clippings from WWI, and music and poetry by members of the Gibbon family.

08.32: Kathryn McKnight donated photographs, documents, and scrapbooks from Teresa Merlino and family, including lots of wonderful information and memorabilia from the Italian community in the Rainier Valley.

08.33: Bonnie Bosworth donated a scrapbook from Franklin High School Class of '42 put together by Tod Johnson, class historian.

08.34: Steve Fiorito donated a 10-inch pipe wrench and a 1-quart bottle with a Grayson & Brown paint thinner label. Buzz Anderson remembers cleaning out old bottles, pasting G&B labels on them, and filling them with paint thinner and other chemicals for sale. Many of the bottles came from the Columbia Funeral Home, and formerly contained embalming fluid. This one looks like it might have had whiskey in it at one time!



08.35: Pat Chemnick gave us a book, "Goals for Seattle: The Report of the Seattle 2000 Commission," a 1973 document outlining the City's "goals and aspirations for the future." It will be interesting to look through this and see how many of those goals were achieved!

08.36: Brian Fairchild donated "Recipes," an old cookbook with a wooden cover—we are still trying to figure out the publication date.

08.37: Brian Fairchild also gave us some poems by Helen June Jacobs.

09.01: The Rainier Rotary Club donated two boxes of photographs, papers, and memorabilia from the 1990s. This was actually given to us several years ago, but we are just now cataloging it. We could use some help identifying people in the photographs—if any of you Rotarians out there would like to stop by the office sometime and help us out, we'd be very grateful!

Collections Update

Volunteers Anna Bergman, Jennifer Smalls, and Chelsea Rodriguez have been meeting on select Saturdays during the fall and winter months to improve the storage and conservation status of the RVHS collection. The big push in January was to move our 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional artifacts from the Maple Tree apartment complex to the Rainier Valley Cultural Center (RVCC). RVHS artifacts had been housed at the Maple Tree apartments for years—many thanks to Jean VelDyke for allowing us to use this space rent-free! However, because of the building's recent sale, these artifacts had to be moved to a new location. Consolidating the collection at RVCC allows staff and volunteers greater access to the collection and streamlines the collection to two storage locations, which is an improvement from the previous three locations. But the RVCC location isn't ideal either, for several reasons, so we are actively looking for a new offsite storage location. If you know of a secure, dry, 400-600 sq. ft. storage space near our office in Columbia City that might be available for little or no rent, please let us know! We have also used remaining grant funds from a 2006 4Culture grant to purchase new storage shelving and archival quality boxes to improve the general conservation status of the collection. If you are interested in volunteering on behalf of the RVHS collection, please contact Mikala Woodward at rvhsoffice@aol.com.

Thank you to Chelsea for heading up these efforts and to Anna and Jennifer for helping out!

Rainier Valley Heritage News

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Office hours.....Wed, Thurs & Fri 10:00am to 1:00pm
RVHS Director.....Mikala Woodward

*The Rainier Valley Historical Society office, exhibits, and events are located at 3710 South Ferdinand Street, an accessible facility. Auxiliary aids and assistance are provided upon request to persons with disabilities.



CULTURE
KING COUNTY LODGING TAX

**Thanks to
King County
for their
operating support**

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

If you haven't joined the Rainier Valley Historical Society this year, we urge you to do so now.

MEMBER

DUES SCHEDULE

Name _____
Address _____
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Phone _____/ Email _____

- Lifetime Member \$150
- Patron \$100
- Sponsor \$ 50
- Organizational / Business Member \$ 50
- Individual / Family (per household) \$ 20

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

DONATIONS

I'd like to volunteer for:

Your tax-deductible donations are encouraged to support the RVHS. We have IRS 501(c)(3) tax deductible status.

- Collections Committee
- Education Committee
- Membership Committee
- Oral History Committee
- Other, please specify _____

Operating Fund \$ _____
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www.rainiervalleyhistory.org

Rainier Valley Food Stories Cookbook

Books are \$18.00, including tax.
To have your order mailed to you, add \$2.00.

Total cookbook order: \$ _____



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