

RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

Fall
September 2014

Volume 45
Number 3

QUARTERLY

No. of Person Voting	NAMES OF VOTERS	No. of Person Voting	NAMES OF VOTERS	No. of Person Voting	NAMES OF VOTERS
226	Mrs L A Hogan	246	W. B. Bannerman	266	Caroline Fremont
227	David Vann	247	Ella Bannerman	267	John Adams Jr.
228	Yvonne Fairfield	248	Eugene White	268	Chas. Millard
229	W. L. Craighero	249	Jessie White	269	H. Parks
230	R. L. Stone	250	Lizzie White	270	Charles Nichols
231	Firma Booth	251	Jane Smith	271	Mary Corther
232	Lavina				James Michalik
233	Margaret				W. A. Davis
234	Janice Knight				Harry Knight
235	Mrs H. C. Rowley				Marshall Alder
236	Annie B. Thomas				Ethel Grisell
237	Carra Cuytar				Anna Green
238	Emma Mansford				Charles J. J. J. J.
239	Mary Hughes				Jacob Morgan
240	Anna Williams				Martha Evans
241	Wm. J. Williams				E. J. Hargrove
242	W. J. Johnson				Lula Vascourt
243	Lige Dixon				R. H. Biebe
244	Simon Christ				Frank Littlefield

RENTON'S LADY VOTERS

by Elizabeth P. Stewart

The earliest women settlers in Washington State began lobbying for full citizenship rights—the right to serve on juries, the right to hold property, and especially the right to vote—as soon as they chocked the wheels of their wagons. After a tantalizing false start in the 1880s—in which women got the right to vote in 1883 but had it invalidated by the Territorial Supreme Court in 1887—women finally won the vote on November 8, 1910, when male voters overwhelmingly ratified the women’s suffrage amendment to the state constitution.¹

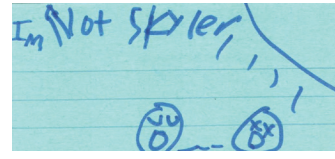
Renton women were ready. A mere two weeks after the amendment was signed by the governor, Rentonite Mary Wilson was the first woman to cast a vote. The 41-year old wife of bricklayer and plasterer Robert H. Wilson, she was the very first of a reported fifty “maids and matrons” in Renton voting on whether the city should form Waterway District #1. She continued to be politically active; in 1922 she was elected the Director of School District No. 52 at Coalfield.²

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2 Little Giant of the Eastside currently on Exhibit at RHM.



3 Museum Report by Elizabeth P. Stewart, Director.



4 President’s Report by Stefanie McIrvine, President.



8 Collections Report by Sarah Samson, Collection Manager.



NEWCASTLE

Little Giant of the Eastside

NEWCASTLE: LITTLE GIANT OF THE EASTSIDE

The Renton History Museum joins forces with the Newcastle Historical Society to present a history of our coal mining neighbor to the North. By the late 1890s, coal mining had made Newcastle the second largest town in King County, second only to Seattle. Pacific Coast Coal Company put its mark on Newcastle in ways that Renton never experienced. When the company left Newcastle after a miners' strike, many Newcastle residents moved to Renton. Come learn about how different neighboring coal mining towns can be in this fascinating look at another Eastside city.

From
SEPTEMBER
9
To
FEBRUARY
7

MUSEUM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM UPDATE

In August we completed step two of our Museum Assessment Program (MAP) on Community Engagement: the site visit. Melissa Prycer, Executive Director of the Dallas Heritage Village, visited Renton on August 6th and 7th and met with Museum staff, board, volunteers, and members of the community at large to talk about the Museum's unique obstacles to fully engaging with the people of Renton. Melissa came armed with a thorough

self-study workbook that a team of stakeholders compiled during June and July. Step three of the process will be a written report outlining things we can do to improve our community engagement.



WHY NOT CONSIDER VOLUNTEERING?

The Museum is actively seeking more Greeters, so if you've ever considered volunteering, now would be a great time. Greeters work in pairs on Saturdays for three-hour shifts (10:00 am-1:00 pm or 1:00 pm-4:00 pm) to open the Museum, greet visitors and take admissions, and close the Museum. It is a fun and easy way to get more involved, and it only takes an hour of training to get started! It's a great opportunity to catch up with a friend,

get community service hours, and work on your people skills by interacting with our friendly visitors. Contact Colleen at clenahan@rentonwa.gov or 425-255-2330 for more information.



MUSEUM REPORT

by Elizabeth P. Stewart,
Museum Director

During Renton River Days, over 350 people came through the Museum. In each temporary exhibit we create, we try to have a “talk back” area where visitors can contribute to the exhibit or comment. During that weekend someone posted this drawing. The sun shines on two stick figures, one of whom is using a gun to kill the other. “I’m Not Skyler,” the caption declares in childlike printing.

You can speculate on whether the shooter or the victim has been mistaken for Skyler, but either way, the disturbing point is that this child used the Museum’s comment area to call attention to a case of mistaken identity with which he (or she) was personally familiar. This child took the time to make this little graffiti, caption it, and stick in to our board, without a parent noticing and questioning; Museum staff were probably the only adults who saw what might have been a cry for help in a space where he or she felt safe making it.

Less than a week later, I attended “Restoring Peace in Our Community,” a West Hill Community Association public meeting about a rash of summer crime, gangs, and violence. (West Hill comprises the eight unincorporated neighborhoods on Renton’s West Hill—Earlington, Bryn Mawr, Lakeridge, Skyway, Campbell Hill, Panorama View, Skycrest, and Hilltop—the children of which mostly attend Renton schools.) Over 100 concerned adults shared ideas about how to restore pride and make their neighborhoods safer. Inevitably the subject of youth came up, and parents, ministers, businesspeople, and Sheriff’s Deputies compared notes about ways to keep kids healthy, busy, and, most of all, hopeful.

I described our collaborative exhibits with Renton High students—some of whom live on West Hill—and offered it as one example for inculcating a sense of pride and community identity in kids, using history. We know from students’ feedback that the project helps them contextualize their own challenging experiences; through research and writing they discover that they are part of something bigger: a community with a history and a unique identity.

This summer has been rife with national examples of kids in need, whether they’re coming across the border to escape drug gangs, or fearful of their next confrontation with an authority figure. One small museum cannot have the answer for the desperate situations in which many kids find themselves, but this note from “Not Skyler” reminds us that our mission as a community heritage institution requires that we at least try to help those who are reaching out to us.



Elizabeth P. Stewart
—
Director



Talk back drawing “I’m Not Skyler.”



West Hill Community Association public meeting.

For more information about West Hill, go to www.MyWestHill.org.

The Museum’s teen advisory council, RenTeens, is actively recruiting for its next session. See their work at <http://renteens.tumblr.com>.

RENTON HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

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P (425) 255-2330
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HOURS:
Tuesday - Saturday
10:00am - 4:00pm

ADMISSION:
\$3 (Adult)
\$1 (Child)



CULTURE

UPCOMING EVENTS



NEWCASTLE: LITTLE GIANT OF THE EASTSIDE OPENING

September 9
5:30-7:30pm

Join us to celebrate the collaboration between the Newcastle Historical Society and the Renton History Museum on this exhibit that traces our neighbor's history.



ANNUAL DINNER AND SILENT AUCTION

October 15
5:30-9:00pm

Join us for a delicious dinner, fabulous auction items, a dessert dash, and fun with your history-minded friends and neighbors. Entertainment by Jazz Horn.



TALES THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

October 25
11:00am-12:00pm

To celebrate Halloween, storyteller Anne Rutherford presents songs and stories at the Museum. For a family audience.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Stefanie McIrvin, President

I'd like to introduce myself to you as the incoming President of the Renton Historical Society Board of Trustees. While I am originally from Eastern Washington, I have lived in Renton for many years and am proud to call it home. My husband and I recently welcomed our first child in March and I can't think of a better place to raise our daughter!

This year marks my third year as a Trustee and I am very excited to be taking on this leadership position. Prior to becoming President, I sat on the Museum Membership Committee and was chair of the Board Development Committee. While on those committees I worked to restructure our membership fees to be more inclusive of all income levels and helped to reorganize our Board committees to better serve the Museum and the community. These positive changes are the foundation for the Board to continue to do good work. Over the next year my goal is to work with the Board and Museum staff to identify more fundraising opportunities and build a core network of supporters.

Throughout my time on the Board I have enjoyed getting to know our members and volunteering at various events throughout the city. I recently spent time at the Museum booth at Renton River Days; every year I am impressed not only by the dedication of our volunteers and Museum staff (we couldn't do it without them!), but also by the support of the greater community of our mission.

Another thing that I love about being a Trustee? Taking part in the ever-changing, exciting new exhibits at the Museum. So far my favorites have been the *Pioneers, Professionals & Politicians: Groundbreaking Women From Renton's Past* and, of course, the *Bigfoot is Probably Real* exhibit! I hope that you have enjoyed them too and have fond memories of your favorites as well.

We have a lot of exciting events and volunteer opportunities coming up. If you haven't already, please save October 15, 2014 on your calendar as our Annual Museum Dinner Auction! It's sure to be a hauntingly good time. Hope to see you there!



Stefanie McIrvin
—
President



President McIrvin presenting the Custer Award at the 2013 Renton Historical Society Annual Meeting.



The Renton Historical Society's booth at Renton River Days.

This 1910 parade down
Renton's Main Street was led
by woman suffragists in white.
(RHM# 1966.001.0209)



RENTON'S LADY VOTERS

Continued from page 1

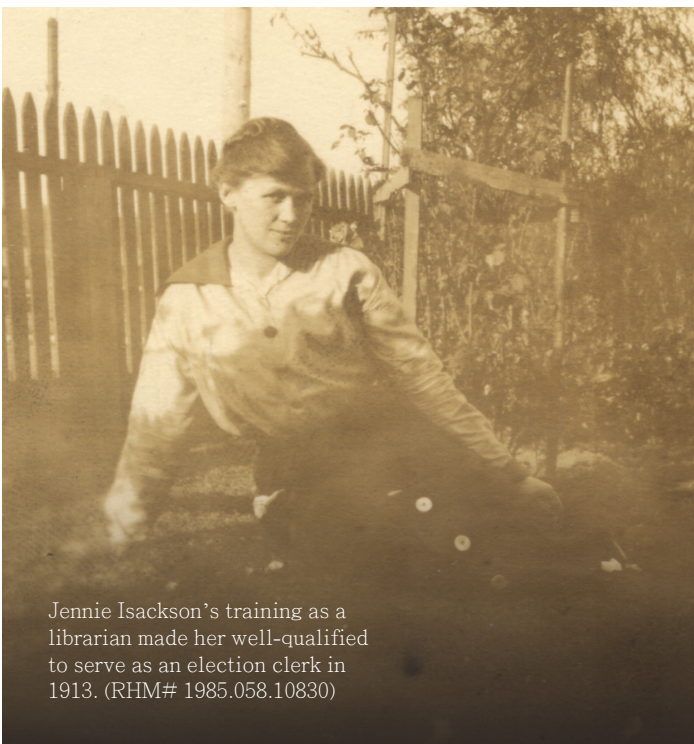
The Renton History Museum is lucky enough to hold several of the earliest records of Renton women voting: primary voter registration books for the Socialist and the Citizens Parties in the 1912 and 1913 elections, and registers for the 1913 and 1915 general elections.³ Comparing these voter records with biographical sources provides a group picture of Renton's earliest female voters. For them, the polling booth was probably the logical culmination of years of discussing issues and preparing to play a stronger role in civic life. That preparation paid off, with women exercising a significant role in Renton's political life as soon as they got the vote. Although "there was [sic] practically no serious contests" in 1913, for example, the turn-out among women resulted in "a large vote [being] polled" nevertheless.⁴

In December 1913 the *Renton Bulletin* celebrated the fact that the election was the first to use "lady election officers." Catherine Dinning, Rinnie Nichols, Margaret Nichols, Mary Jane Rees, Lydia Trent, and June Hancock all served as election judges, with Jennie Isackson, Mrs. R. H. Hunt, Theresa Oehm, Alice A. Davis, and Maggie

Cover: page from the 1912 Citizens
Party voter registration book.
Women voters are highlighted.
(RHM# 2002.053.006)



Organizations like the Order of the Eastern Star, Nesika Chapter #54 were training grounds for women's civic involvement. Six of these fifteen women were voters: Matilda Gunn (front row, 1st on left), Jeanette Mulligan (4th from left), Susan Jane McKinley (middle row, center), Rachel Edwards (middle row, far right), Mattie Bevan (back row, 2nd from left), and Melissa Ticknor (4th from left).



Jennie Isackson's training as a librarian made her well-qualified to serve as an election clerk in 1913. (RHM# 1985.058.10830)

Harner working as election clerks. The newspaper reported that "the ladies performed their duties in the most commendable and satisfactory manner."⁵

Drawn as they were from Renton's professional class, these women did their work "accurately and without a hitch." Maggie Harner, for example, was the wife of the Assistant City Engineer, Garfield Harner, and Catherine Dinning was the widow of coal mine inspector William D. Dinning. Some were undoubtedly selected for their own skills rather than their family connections, however; 23-year old Jennie Isackson was a librarian-in-training and 26-year old Theresa Oehm was a stenographer at a wholesale paper company in Seattle.⁶

The older judges and clerks—like 32-year old Alice Davis, 37-year old Rinnie Nichols, and 49-year old Mary Jane Rees—came out of the ranks of Renton's women's sororities and civic groups. Mary Jane Rees, for example, was active in the local Nesika chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star, as well as the Columbine Rebekah Lodge of the International Order of the Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) and the Renton Baptist Church. Rinnie



Early women voters were well represented among the faculty of the Central School in 1911— 1912. Voters were Clara Blondé (front row, 4th from left), Kate Bassen (2nd row, 1st on left), Elizabeth Ferguson (back row, 3rd from left), Martha Groat (back row, 2nd from right), and Florence Guitteau (back row, far right). (RHM# 1966.087.0512)

Nichols and Alice Davis were also Eastern Star members, with Nichols active in Holly Camp No. 3359 of the Royal Neighbors of America and Davis a member of the Women’s Benefit Association and the Hospital Guild.⁷

Both the Nesika Chapter (Eastern Star) and the Rebekahs were founded in Renton in 1899, when Renton was a city of less than 500 people.⁸ These female chapters of male lodges served the same function for women that they did for men: they provided leadership opportunities, training in organizational skills and teamwork, and a way to improve the community. For women, involvement in these organizations was particularly important, because in the late 19th and early 20th centuries most did not have the same career access that men did. For many women, serving as a lodge or sorority member was a chance to exchange serious ideas with their peers—about politics, perhaps, but certainly about the direction of their community—and to join with others to take action.

Among the 58 early women voters listed in our books for whom we have biographical details, twenty-nine (50%) were members of Eastern Star,

Pythian Sisters, Rebekahs, the Washington State and/or King County Pioneers Associations, and/or active in various churches.⁹ Minnie Belle Custer Thomas (later Henehan), for example, was elected President of the King County Pioneers Association later in life. The daughter of Renton pioneers Charles S. and Susan Jane Custer, Minnie Belle’s family had been prominent in the city since 1881. Indeed, many of the women’s club members who were voters in 1912 and 1913 also represented Renton’s pioneering families: Janet McNaught Faull, Ella Beanblossom, Susan Jane and Florence Custer, Jane Duff, Lizzie Dobson, and Margaret and Jane Storey.

Nannie Evans is another example of Renton’s leading women who voted. Nannie went to the polls in 1912 with her boarder, teacher Clara Blondé, and her daughter-in-law, Edith Evans. Nannie’s husband, Harold Evans, had been buying and selling real estate in the Renton area for some years, and by 1910 he had helped found Citizens Bank.¹⁰ But, at age 50, Nannie had also accomplished many things on her own. In addition

Continued on page 9



Torchbearer Brandon Kindle on his leg of the relay (RHM# 1999.006.12054)

COLLECTION REPORT

by Sarah Samson,
Collection Manager



Sarah Samson
—
Collection Manager

Eighteen years ago Renton played host to a leg of the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics Torch Relay. On May 8th the Olympic flame made its way to Renton from Seattle. The route through Renton was a short one. Beginning at the train depot at 4th and Burnett, the torch traveled north on Burnett and then east on 3rd past the Museum onto Mill. It continued on to Bronson and then onto Highway 169 out of town.

Local businesses opened early for the 6:30am relay, with some providing the spectators with coffee and donuts. Businesses also decorated for the event, displaying 8 ft. long banners advertising the relay and Renton. Three of those banners, displayed during the relay at the Renton Flower Shop, are now part of the Museum’s collection, donated by Toni Nelson.

The relay featured three Rentonites as torchbearers: Renton Senior Activity Center volunteer Shirley Wasser, Seafirst Bank employee Amy Jahn, and Renton High School senior Chau Troung. Plans changed quickly the morning of the relay though when one torchbearer did not show up. Brandon Kindle, the 13-year-old grandson of Mayor Jesse Tanner, stepped



1996 Atlanta Olympic Torch Relay banners from Renton (RHM#2014.018)

in and got the opportunity of a lifetime to be an Olympic torchbearer.

Renton’s part in the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay lasted just one morning, but the Relay itself stretched from April to July. The Olympic flame arrived in Los Angeles from Greece and from there, it took a meandering path up the West Coast, and across the West through Utah and Colorado. In Kansas it headed south to Louisiana and then turned north and went all the way up to Minneapolis. The torch then passed through Chicago and Detroit before heading to the Northeast. It traveled down the East Coast and then over to Tennessee and down into Alabama. After a quick trip down Florida to Miami, the flame finally finished its trek in Atlanta. Muhammad Ali, the final torchbearer, sent the flame into the cauldron where it burned for the duration of the games.¹

We are thrilled to have a small piece of the history of the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics here at the Museum. These three banners are now safely housed in the Museum’s collection and serve as evidence of Renton’s participation in this global event.

ENDNOTES

¹ “Torches and Torch Relays of the Olympic Summer Games from Berlin 1936 to London 2012,” Olympic Studies Centre, p.61.

MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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to raising four children, she was a charter member of the Columbine Rebekah Lodge, and she was active in the Nesika Lodge and the Washington State Pioneer Association. After her husband's death in 1934 she would continue developing downtown properties. Described at her death as "an indomitable figure of wifehood, motherhood and citizenship," she was an example to other women.¹¹

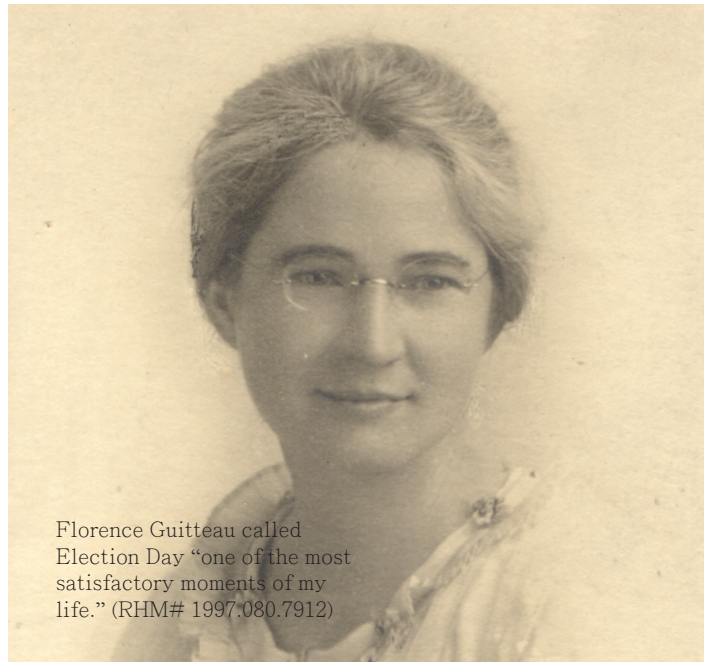
Nannie's husband, Harold, had served as a councilmember under Renton's first Mayor, Abijah Beach; many of the other new women voters also had political connections through their husbands. Melissa Ticknor's husband, Benjamin, had just completed a term as Mayor in 1911 and Ellen Smithers' husband, Fred, was Mayor in 1912. Jessie Ticknor's husband, Al, was City Clerk in 1910, and Grace Williams' husband, Sidney, had served as City Attorney from 1901 to 1908. Other voters had husbands or sons who would go on to serve in the future: Mary Baxter, the mother of Mayor Joseph R. Baxter (1949 – 1960); Ella Beanblossom, the wife of Mayor George Beanblossom (1939 – 1943);



Nannie Evans was "an indomitable figure of wifehood, motherhood and citizenship."
(RHM# 1987.058.2529)

and Mary Fuller and Janet Faull, the wives of future councilmembers. Emma Dullahant was a 1913 voter and a 1928 Noble Grand in the Rebekahs, but her daughter Eleanor Dullahant (later Fortson) was too young to vote. Eleanor would be elected to the Washington State House of Representatives for the 10th District in 1972, 1974, and 1976.¹²

But one voter in particular went on to develop her own political career, albeit brief. Hattie Butler voted in the 1913 election in Renton, and by 1918 she was elected as Renton's first female councilmember, and, it turned out, the first woman councilmember in the state. It must have been her "deep social consciousness" that encouraged women voters to put her and Gertrude Feek on the ballot as independent candidates; Butler was reportedly surprised to learn that she had won a seat. She took her seat with the other councilmembers in January 1919 and apparently served one unremarkable term. She and her husband were later active in union affairs.¹³



Florence Guitteau called Election Day "one of the most satisfactory moments of my life." (RHM# 1997.080.7912)



Hattie M. Butler, elected Renton's first female Councilmember in 1918, and her husband, James, ca. 1890. (RHM# 1997.099.0291)

In November 1914 the much-anticipated Prohibition vote was finally on the state ballot, in the form of Initiative No. 3, an initiative to ban the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. "How will the women vote be cast on this question is one of the puzzles of politics this year," the *Renton Bulletin* observed. "Unquestionable [sic] the carrying of the measure depends upon the women vote."¹⁴ Although we have no record of how the women of Renton voted, Florence Guitteau probably spoke for many when she recorded in her diary, "*Election day—and one of the most satisfactory moments of my life when I put X for prohibition. It may not carry this time, but I know it will some day.*"¹⁵ When Prohibition passed in 1914, women began to truly understand their power as voting citizens. 🍷

ENDNOTES

- 1 T. A. Larson, "The Women's Suffrage Movement in Washington," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 67 (April 1976), 49-62. The University of Washington created an excellent online exhibit about the state's women suffrage movement, *A Ballot for the Ladies: Washington Women's Struggle for the Vote (1850-1910)*, on their web site at <http://content.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/suffrage/>, accessed 25 July 2014.
- 2 "First Woman to Cast Vote In State of Washington," *Seattle Daily Times*, 11 December 1910, p.1; "City News," *Renton Bulletin*, 5 May 1922, p. 4.
- 3 These voter rolls are: "Primary Election Poll Book and Tally Sheet Of the Citizens Party / Renton 2nd Ward Precinct, / State of Washington / Election Held on the 5 day of Nov 1912," Renton History Museum #2002.053.006; "Primary Election Poll Book and Tally Sheet Of the Socialist Party / [Renton] 1st Precinct, / State of Washington / Election Held on the 5 day of Nov 1912," Renton History Museum #2002.053.005; "Poll Book of a General Election held on the 2 day of December, [1913], Renton Precinct, Ward 1, County of King, State of Washington," Renton History Museum #1994.008.001; "Poll Book of a General Election held on the 7th day of December, 1915, Renton Precinct, Ward 1, County of King, State of Washington," Renton History Museum #1994.008.002.
- 4 *Renton Bulletin*, 5 December 1913, p.1.
- 5 "Lady Election Officers," *Renton Bulletin*, 5 December 1913, p.1.
- 6 "Lady Election Officers," *Renton Bulletin*, 5 December 1913, p.1.
- 7 "Mary J. Rees, Renton Pioneer, Taken by Death," *Renton Chronicle*, ca. 13 September 1937; "Mrs. Alice Davis Dies in Issaquah," *Renton Chronicle*, 21 November 1962.
- 8 Morda C. Slauson, *Renton, From Coal to Jets* (revised edition, Renton, WA: Olympic Reprographics for Renton Historical Society, 1976, 2006), 112-113.

- 9 This reflects those women for whom we have any biographical information, from obituaries, early newspapers, census and other records, oral histories, and family reminiscences, all of which served as sources for this article. We regret that we have no biographical information for 52 of the 170 women in the three poll books.
- 10 Besides Clara Blondé, other teachers who voted in Renton's earliest elections were: Kathryn Bassen, Elizabeth Ferguson, Martha Groat, and Katherine McCraig.
- 11 "Primary Election Poll Book and Tally Sheet Of the Citizens Party, 1912," Renton History Museum #2002.053.006; Dan B. McGovern, "Many Friends Pay Tribute to the Life of Mrs. N. Evans," *Renton Chronicle*, 15 April 1948.
- 12 "Eleanor Fortson Dies; Ex-Legislator was 93," *Seattle Times*, 13 October 1997.
- 13 "The Annual City Election," *Renton Bulletin*, 6 December 1918, p.1; "New Council Takes Office," *Renton Bulletin*, 10 January 1919, p.1; "First Woman Councilman Dies," *Renton News Record*, 19 October 1939, p.1. The headline for the January 1919 article in the *Bulletin* observed that "Mrs. Butler Qualifies" for office as if there was some doubt, but gave no further details. Other notable Renton political women were absent from the 1912 and 1913 records, however. Agnes Norby Richmond began her political career by serving on Renton's Library Board; she became City Attorney in 1925 after earning her law degree. Agnes Edwards started her career in government service in 1923 under the mentorship of Paul Houser Jr.; she went on to serve as the city's first woman Treasurer until 1927, and then became the Renton's first female City Clerk.
- 14 "How Will the Women Vote," *Renton Bulletin*, 23 October 1914, p.1.
- 15 Florence Guitteau Diary, 3 November 1914, p.289 (RHM# 2014.023.002).



7TH ANNUAL RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BENEFIT DINNER AND SILENT AUCTION

Get your tickets now for the Annual Benefit Dinner and Silent Auction on Wednesday, October 15, 2014 at the Renton Senior Activity Center. The event will feature fabulous silent auction items, delicious meal, dessert dash, and entertainment provided by Jazz Horn. Please support the Renton History Museum by celebrating Renton's past and promising future! Tickets are \$40 per person or \$300 for a table of eight. Call the Museum at 425.255.2330 to reserve your space now or order online at www.brownpapertickets.com.

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OCTOBER
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6:00 PM

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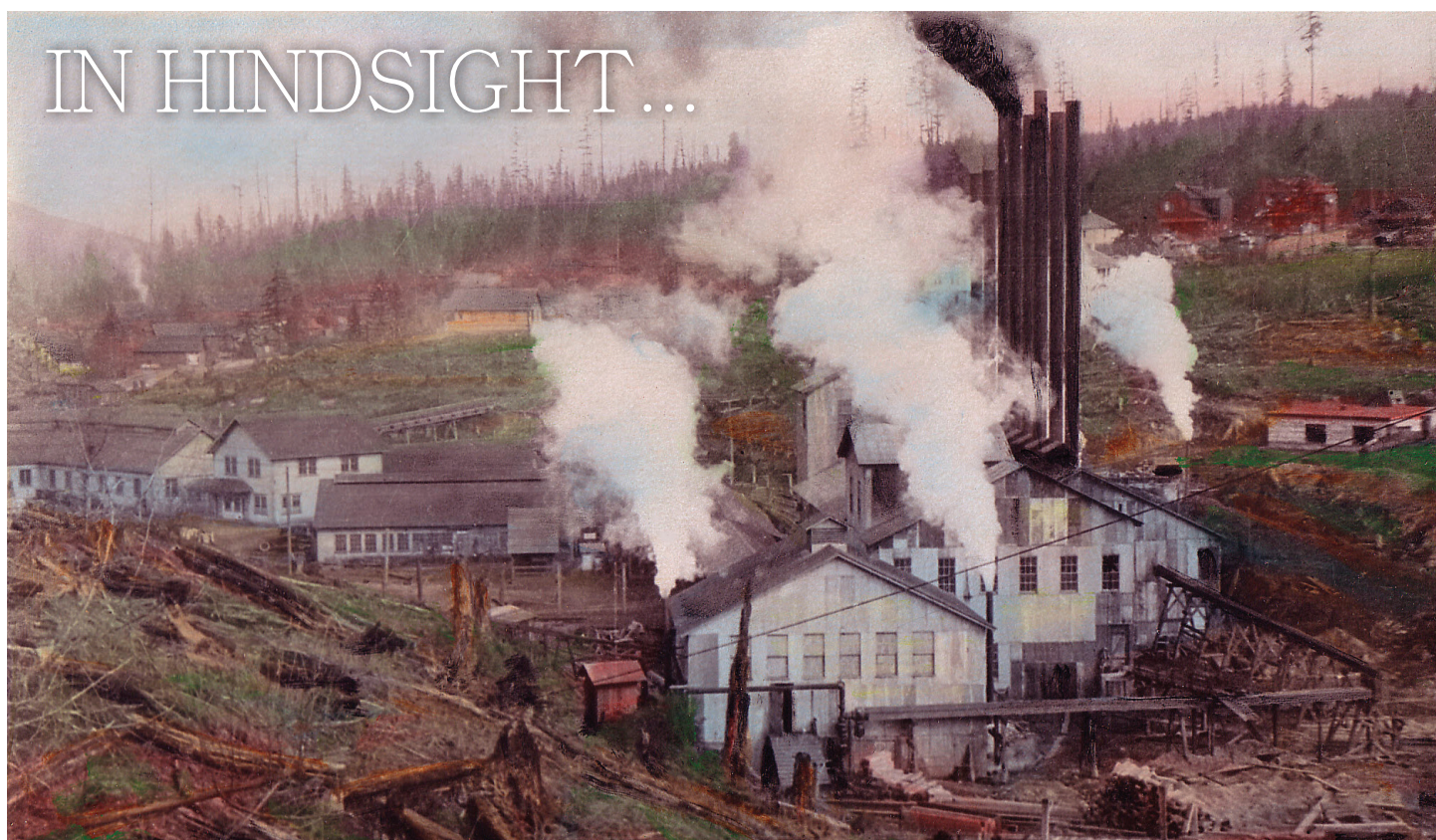
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RENTON HISTORY MUSEUM
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Pacific Coast Coal Company at the Ford Slope Mine in Newcastle, ca. 1922. (Photo courtesy of Joe & Tami Micheletti.)