

# RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

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QUARTERLY



## A FIENDISH DEED: PART II by Sarah Samson

*The May 29, 1906 murder of Elsie Millhuff rocked Renton to its core. No Renton papers survive (that we have found) from 1906. This story was pieced together using Seattle and other newspapers, Renton City Council minutes, census records, city directories, and oral histories. The following is the second of a two-part account of the mystery of Elsie's murder. At the end of the first part, paperboy Thomas Nelligan had been released from police custody and Elsie was buried in Mt. Olivet Cemetery.*

*A special thank you to Reed Millhuff, Jr. for assisting me in research and sharing his family history and photographs.*

**W**ith their only suspect released, authorities scrambled for other leads. Locally, Marshall Jake Maze was in charge. He had ended his term as Renton Marshall on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, a mere 27 days before Elsie's murder; Joseph Edwards replaced him as of May 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup> There is little mention of Edwards in the newspaper coverage of the case, however, perhaps the more experienced Maze seemed a better choice to handle the case. The minutes of the June 5<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting do not mention the murder but show the Council approved that "Ex-Marshall Maze be paid for services to date."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps

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| currently on exhibit  
at RHM.



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Stewart, Director.

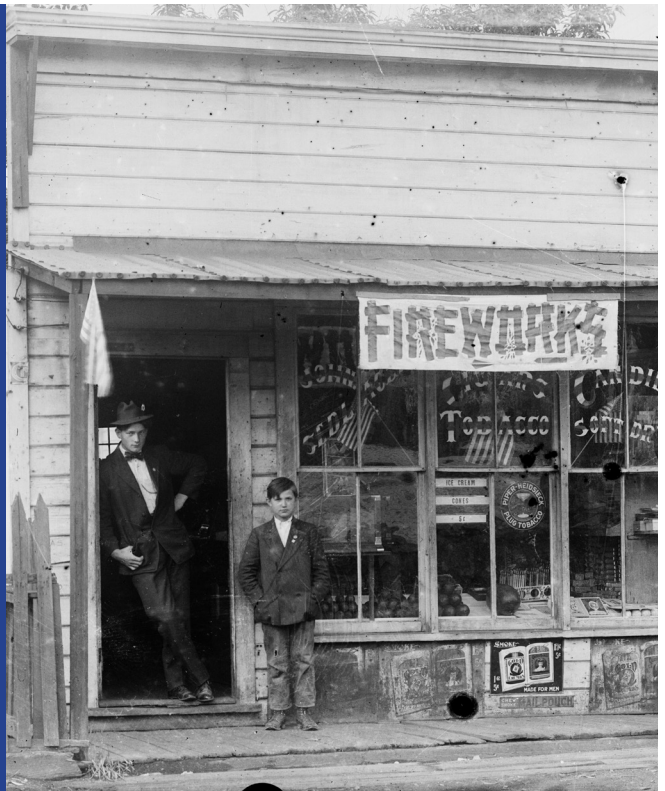


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| story of Jan Van  
Laar.

# Frozen IN Time



## FROZEN IN TIME

After nine years of research, the Renton History Museum is finally able to exhibit its collection of 49 rare glass plate negatives with 70 images of the city’s businesses and residences identified through dogged historical detective work. In 1909 an unknown photographer went door to door to capture the city’s aspirations, perhaps for exhibit at Seattle’s Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. The negatives were developed in 2009, a project made possible by a grant from 4Culture. Enjoy this glimpse of our city in its youth along with the maps and other sources that reveal it.

From  
MAY  
31  
to  
OCTOBER  
29

## MUSEUM NAMED BEST NONPROFIT IN RENTON

The Renton History Museum recently had the distinction of being named “Best Nonprofit 2016” in the Renton Reporter’s Best of Renton 2016 competition. Winners were selected through an online nomination and voting process that reached out to readers of Renton’s local newspaper. Past winners have included the Salvation Army, BECU, and YWCA South King County. We are very excited to have been recognized by Renton residents for the excellence of our community service.

We believe the award is also a vote for the importance of heritage preservation and education in our community, and we’ll continue to strive to live up to Rentonites’ expectations.



## WELCOME OUR NEW OFFICE AIDE NICHOLE!

Next time you stop by the Museum, please welcome our new Museum Office Aide, Nichole Jones. Nichole is a new Renton transplant from Port Angeles, where she was a Board member, volunteer coordinator, and historian for Story People of Clallam County and a tour guide for Port Angeles Heritage Tours. Nichole has an M.A. in History from Eastern Illinois University. She will be your first stop for help with donations, membership renewals, and all other

office-related help. She’s already a quick study of Renton history and is eager to learn more about her new home. We’re thrilled to have her as part of our team!



# MUSEUM REPORT

by Elizabeth P. Stewart,  
Museum Director

One of the most moving experiences I've had as a museum professional was attending the Wall of Honor Celebration at Renton High School recently. Organized over many months by Friends of Renton Schools, this event singles out distinguished Renton High alumni for honor, based on their accomplishments in high school, but mostly in life. Honorees have included Mayors (Don Custer, Frank Ailment, Charles Delaurenti), a Presidential Cabinet member (Sally Jewell), the co-founder of the Harlem Dance Company (Karel Shook), a Hollywood filmmaker and stuntman (Gary Kent), a Vietnam-era POW (Charles Southwick), restaurateurs, CEOs of businesses, doctors, lawyers, scientists, educators, public servants, and athletes. Induction into the Wall of Honor gives these high achievers accolades, but more importantly, the Wall of Honor calls attention to the number of examples available to high school age students. Renton High—and Renton—has produced accomplished strivers in so many different areas of life, it's hard not to imagine these people as role models for youth looking to an uncertain future.

Collection Manager Sarah Samson and I have served as back-up researchers for three rounds of Wall of Honor nominees now, since 2011. We fact-check incomplete nomination forms, track down information in old newspapers and other sources, and generally look for missing information on these people's lives, to help the committee get a complete picture of who they are and what they've done. It's easy to get caught up in the drama of piecing together the lives of Rentonites who never expected honors, and thus never went out of their way to seek attention for their work. Sometimes the story is frustratingly thin, and some nominees have been set aside for more research and future honors. The committee members themselves—mentioning no names—have in some cases become crack researchers.

Research for projects like the Wall of Honor, genealogies, student projects, historic preservation grants and landmark nominations, and for people who are curious is one of the services the Museum staff provide. We often assist City staff by answering obscure questions like, "who were the architects on the 200 Mill Building?" or "when did the car dealers move out of Downtown Renton?" If the Museum's collections can be used to help people feel more knowledgeable about their community or—in the case of the Wall of Honor—help youth understand the possibilities that life holds, then we have done important work.



Elizabeth P. Stewart  
—  
Director



Wall of Honor award for Ethel Telban (Class of 1932), long-time Renton Historical Society President.



Assistant Superintendent Damien Pattenaude (Class of 1995) speaking after receiving his place on the Wall of Honor.

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QUARTERLY  
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RENTON, WA 98057

P (425) 255-2330  
F (425) 255-1570

HOURS:  
Tuesday - Saturday  
10:00am - 4:00pm



CULTURE

## UPCOMING EVENTS



TOO HIGH AND TOO STEEP: RESHAPING SEATTLE'S TOPOGRAPHY: AUTHOR'S TALK WITH DAVID B. WILLIAMS  
June 14  
7:00-8:30 pm

Author David B. Williams explores the dramatic human intervention that remade the landscape of Seattle and Renton, too, in the cities' first century.



PHOTOGRAPHIC POP-UP EXHIBIT AND WORKSHOP  
June 18  
12:00-2:00 pm

RHM staff will give a short presentation and answer questions about photographic storage and conservation. Focus will be on photos from the 50s, 60s, and 70s, but all are welcome to bring photos!



CURATOR'S TALK: SARAH SAMSON ON *FROZEN IN TIME*  
July 14  
6:00-7:30 pm

In conjunction with our *Frozen In Time* exhibit, Collection Manager Sarah Samson discusses the extensive research done on the Museum's collection of 1909 glass plate negatives.

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Stefanie McIrvin, President

As we plan for our annual membership meeting on June 8, I am reminded that this will be my last newsletter article as President of the Renton Historical Society. The conclusion of my term as President is sentimental; I am thankful for the opportunity to have served the Museum in a leadership role and I am looking forward to supporting the good work of the next President.

While I wish we had accomplished all of the goals I had set out for the Board when I took office two years ago, I can say that I am pleased with what we achieved in the short timeframe I was President. First and foremost, my ultimate goal was to increase awareness of the Museum throughout the community and encourage trustees to network within it. We accomplished this in many ways, the most impressive being our new membership and fundraising event last fall at The Red House. The event opened new pathways for civic involvement for the Board and the Museum, and we were able to create lasting partnerships with the downtown business community. I am proud to have led that effort and I hope to see it continued in the future.

I am also proud to have led the Board through a productive retreat this year. We focused on strategic fundraising and how to understand and leverage our individual strengths, and while applying simple yet effective strategies for positive change. While change can be difficult, the Board came out of the retreat feeling invigorated and excited to take on new ideas.

During my time as President I also learned about what it means to be a good leader. It means listening and including everyone at the table during discussions. It means ensuring that all feel as though they are able to voice their opinions, even when you may disagree. And it means saying thank you to everyone who works hard to accomplish your goals. To that end: Thank you to the incredible Museum staff who have supported me throughout my time as President. Your words of encouragement and professionalism are second-to-none. Thank you to the Board of Trustees for your care of the Museum and the Historical Society, and for your innovative ideas. Thank you to our members for your diligent financial support and volunteerism the last two years. I am excited to see where you all go from here and I know you are in good hands with the next President.



Stefanie McIrvin  
—  
President



Then-VP Meris Mullaley and President McIrvin at the 2015 Annual Meeting.



President McIrvin with her family, Councilmember Ryan McIrvin and their daughter, at the 2015 fundraiser at the Red House.

## A FIENDISH DEED: PART II



Renton Marshall Jake Mazey, ca. 1902.  
(RHM# 1991.013.3270)



Night Watchman Jack Stewart, 1894.  
(RHM# 41.0212)

Continued from page 1

responding to the panic the town was in, the Council also appointed Jack Stewart to the position of Night Watchman.<sup>3</sup>

Almost immediately after Tom Nelligan's release from police custody, his father sent him into hiding in Seattle. "Rumors that Tom might be dealt with harshly reached us through women who had heard some men talking on the street," said Thomas Nelligan, Sr. "I don't believe anyone would harm Tom but we cannot afford to run chances considering the feeling that too much liquor might work up in irresponsible citizens."<sup>4</sup>

Residents grew restless and frustrated at the lack of a viable suspect, so much so that the Welsh miners in town reportedly "resolved to torture and lynch the murderer if he can be caught and his guilt proven."<sup>5</sup> A town hall meeting was hastily organized. Agitated Rentonites argued for the raising of a reward for "capture and conviction of the fiendish murderer"; by the end of the evening nearly \$2,250 was pledged, \$1000 from the county, \$500 from Renton's City Council, and \$744 from the people of Renton.<sup>6</sup> Adjusted for inflation, the \$2,250 raised that night would be worth around \$60,000 in today's dollars.

Cover photo:  
Elsie's gravesite in Mt.  
Olivet Cemetery in Renton.

# YOU DID IT! Cries The CRIMINAL'S THUMB

Remarkable Success of State Bureau of Identification in Solving Recent Crimes by Analyzing Finger Prints

By Frank H. de Pue  
Head of the State Bureau of Identification

THE Sunday Call has requested me to tell its readers something about my work in connection with the state bureau of identification, the use of finger prints as a means of providing a system of filing records of every criminal apprehended by officers of the law and of such nature as to enable the police or other authorities to positively know their man, irrespective of the length of time that may elapse between the time the record is made and the date of some other criminal act committed, say, long years afterward; a record the basis of which can never alter from infancy to old age, even to death, providing decomposition of the body has not begun, and yet withal of so simple a nature that a mere schoolboy can, with a little practice demonstrate its feasibility, although at the same time a comprehensive knowledge of the science of finger prints requires the closest application, and one may say, years of study.

I shall not attempt to explain in detail the intricacy of the system employed at San Quentin and Folsom state prisons, but rather endeavor to make it as clear as possible how finger prints are utilized as records and why the system is being adopted by many other institutions of like nature.

At the outset I wish to make the following statement: There are no differences of opinion among the scientific authorities of the criminal cases after the fact that there is not an



be filed of each individual, which may be sent broadcast throughout the country, in event of possible escape, violation of parole, or, as frequently happens, to be used in case he commits some other crime following his release, a system has been evolved which embraces photography, certain physical measurements and the employment of finger prints.

**How Photographs Fail**  
Neither photographs nor physical measurements are infallible as a means of identification. I have before me a clipping from the New York Herald, which reads as follows: "Paris, Nov. 15.—The supporters of M. Bertillon and his system of identification of criminals are rejoicing over a conspicuous failure of photography in this but when a man's own finger prints are taken, the never will it be up to him how they get there, but when you stop to consider the circumstances of the criminal cases after the fact that there is not an

comparison of our prison identification giving us the necessary proof.

Hotel registers have been subjected to the closest scrutiny times over, and in an important case now pending the first evidence was secured through such means.

Of course there must necessarily be some pressure on the article handled in order to permit of the imprint being developed and photographs made of the original.

The ordinary person when writing holds the paper in position before him by means of the left hand, generally allowing two or more fingers to rest upon the surface of the writing material. This is particularly true in the making out of checks and other similar commercial paper.

**A Notable Local Case**  
The police yesterday failed to locate the mysterious Sydney Carpenter, the alleged accomplice of John Fitzgerald, who burglarized the Hoefler home at 139 Haight street Friday morning, and from the investigations made yesterday Captain of Detectives Duke is inclined to believe that Fitzgerald was alone in his work. Frank H. de Pue, superintendent of the state bureau of identification and a man who has had much to do with making popular the finger imprint system, was a visitor at police headquarters yesterday morning.

Pue compared the thumb imprint found on the card boxes from the desk on the first floor of the Hoefler home with the finger imprints developed from the finger prints of the accused man, Edith Hoefler, and gave it as his opinion that they were those of the same man. He never will it be up to him how they get there, but when you stop to consider the circumstances of the criminal cases after the fact that there is not an

upon the man. For the first time in the criminal history of San Francisco, too, the police will try to fix a crime by means of the identification drawn from the finger prints of the accused man. Fitzgerald is the man who is charged with having entered the residence of Louis Hoefler, 139 Haight street, early last Friday morning and with having struck Miss Edith Hoefler, the young daughter of the house, in a peculiarly brutal way when she awakened while he was in her room and sought to give alarm to her parents. In searching the Hoefler home Captain Duke gathered some bits of paper in the room on the lower floor that Fitzgerald had handled, and

coming out plainly enough under the powdered charcoal.

Finger prints have been taken as evidence in courts before, although never in California, and constitute competent evidence. They constitute evidence of such value that the police authorities are desirous of adding this identification system to the resources of the department.

**Catching a Murderer**  
Louis Hemeter, the suspected murderer of Miss Millhuff, the little Renton girl the killing of whom caused so much excitement last May, was detected to be known by a former convict, and by Superior Judge Hall

the time of her death and photographed bloody finger prints found on the white garment. He ascertained that an itinerant clock repairer had been in the vicinity that afternoon. A few months ago Louis Hemeter was arrested in a little town in Pierce county and in a little town in Pierce county. He was well supplied with the details of the case and he wanted to talk about the case whenever any one would listen to him. The man's demeanor grew suspicious. Maxey went to Tacoma and took prints of Hemeter's fingers and thumbs. These he sent to the United States government prison at Fort Leavenworth for enlargement and comparison. They were identical with the bloody imprints on the murdered girl's clothes.

While checks are daily being forged, in many cases with apparent impunity, some of such nature are becoming more and more dangerous for the large and

small

San Francisco Call, 23 Feb 1908, p.6.

## OTHER SUSPECTS

Though they chased down any lead they could find, after Nelligan the police had no real suspects. Abe Offield, described alternately as "epileptic" and "insane," lived with his parents close to the murder scene. He was questioned but his parents provided his alibi: he was locked in his room alone the night Elsie was killed.<sup>7</sup> Another man, William Duncan, was also arrested the day after the murder after he was found drunk in Seattle covered in red stains. The stains proved to be red paint, but they charged him with vagrancy anyway and sent him to the chain gang for thirty days.<sup>8</sup> Someone mutilated three horses in Redmond a few days after Elsie's murder, and police briefly considered whether that "knife wielder" was the man they were looking for.<sup>9</sup> The lack of progress on the investigation prompted the public to come forth with all sorts of inventive ideas. The *Seattle Daily Times* reported that "[s]piritualists, persons believing in hypnotism, and other voodoo proceedings have all contributed suggestions" to the police.<sup>10</sup>

Again frustrated by the lack of progress on the case, Renton's citizens met in mid-June. With rumors and suspicions unchecked and several law enforcement agencies involved, residents decided to create a committee to act as the voice of the town and to assist where they could. This five-man committee included Marshall Joseph Edwards, Night Watchman Jack Stewart, Police Judge Robert Thorburn, and coal miners Thomas F. O'Brien and James Oughton.<sup>11</sup> Between them these five men had twenty children under the age of seventeen living in Renton.

## A BREAK IN THE CASE

In December Elsie's case was splashed across newspapers again. This time police had a viable suspect. Louis Hemeter, a forty-one-year-old German immigrant and traveling watch repairer, was in jail in Pierce County for assaulting little girls in Sumner. Hemeter reportedly spoke of Elsie's murder while in custody, and police later believed that he was in fact in Renton on the day of her murder.<sup>12</sup>

Hemeter was not a sympathetic figure. Pierce County Judge William H. Snell declared Hemeter "the most pronounced pervert" he'd ever confronted.<sup>13</sup> "Hemeter is a freakish fellow," said King County Sheriff L. C. Smith. "He thinks that he is in possession of a capacity to understand people without words, feeling them out, so to speak."<sup>14</sup> At his trial for the Pierce County assaults, Hemeter accosted one of his young accusers in the courtroom. He jumped at her, kissed, and hugged her before authorities managed to wrangle him back under control.<sup>15</sup>

After Hemeter was convicted of the Sumner assaults, Deputy Sheriff Thomas Maxey of Kittitas County traveled to Pierce County to take Hemeter's prints. He was an early adopter of the new fingerprinting technology. Self-taught in the ways of criminology, Maxey had worked his way up from janitor at the county courthouse all the way to Deputy Sheriff in just two years. He kept bloodhounds for tracking suspects and also had a laboratory for the study of the new Bertillon system of criminal measurement.<sup>16</sup> Fingerprinting was Maxey's latest study. A week after Elsie's murder, Maxey



Renton's paperboys for the *Seattle Star*, ca. 1906. Reed Millhuff is seated 4<sup>th</sup> from right, 1<sup>st</sup> row. George Millhuff is 2<sup>nd</sup> from right, 2<sup>nd</sup> row. (RHM# 41.0835)

had traveled to Renton to collect evidence; he found two bloody fingerprints on her clothing.<sup>17</sup> Now that Hemeter was in custody, Maxey had a suspect's prints to compare against the clothing.

Maxey sent Hemeter's prints and pieces of Elsie's clothing to Ft. Leavenworth for analysis; before the formation of the FBI in 1908, the U.S. Army was briefly on the cutting edge of fingerprint analysis.<sup>18</sup> The prints were deemed a match and by mid-February 1907 Maxey was planning to testify against Hemeter in order to bring charges against him for Elsie's murder.<sup>19</sup> This would have been the first use of fingerprinting evidence in a criminal trial in Washington State.<sup>20</sup>

Around the same time Maxey determined the prints were a match, Judge Snell declared Hemeter criminally insane.<sup>21</sup> He was shipped to the Eastern State Hospital for the Insane in Medical Lake, WA.<sup>22</sup> As far as we can find, Hemeter was not charged nor tried for Elsie's murder. An article printed near the ten-year anniversary of her death makes no mention of Hemeter and declares the crime unsolved.<sup>23</sup> Hemeter remained an inmate at the hospital until he hung himself in 1938.<sup>24</sup>

#### THE AFTERMATH: THE NELLIGAN FAMILY

Suspect Nelligan's family was irreparably harmed by the events following Elsie's murder. Young Tom fled to Seattle and went into hiding.<sup>25</sup> Renton residents since 1881, Tom's father, mother, and three sisters tried to remain in town, but by June 8<sup>th</sup> the *Seattle Star* reported that their home was for sale.<sup>26</sup>

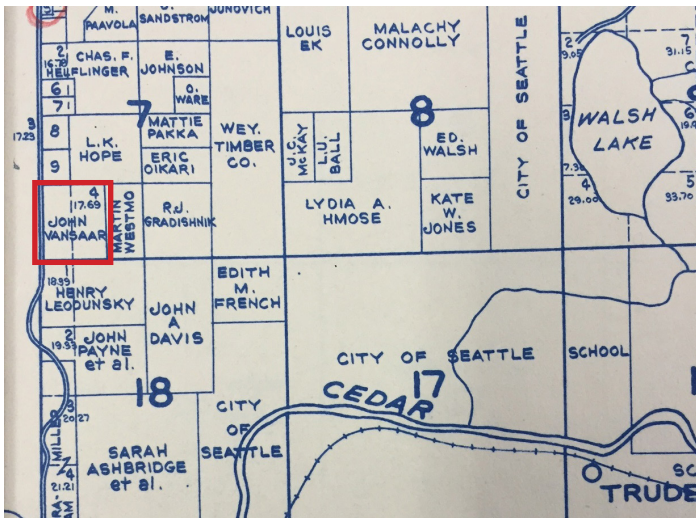
They appear to have moved to Seattle, though their presence in censuses and directories was very spotty once they left Renton.

Tom attempted to get a job as a switchman for the Northern Pacific Railway, but was rejected for failing the eyesight test.<sup>27</sup> The last record of Tom is his WWI draft registration card that lists him as a steam-fitter helper for a Seattle shipbuilder in 1918. Ellen Nelligan, Tom's mother, died in Seattle in 1917. Tom's eldest sister Catherine lived and worked as a tailoress in Seattle until 1903, when she drops out of the historical record.<sup>28</sup> Thomas Nelligan, Sr. died in 1921; he was living in Sacramento with his daughters Henrietta and Flora.<sup>29</sup> Tom Jr.'s reputation in Renton never recovered and people still mistakenly remembered him as Elsie's killer more than 70 years after the fact.<sup>30</sup>

#### THE AFTERMATH: THE MILLHUFF FAMILY

The Millhuff family experienced more than its share of tragedy. Prior to Elsie's murder they had lost two babies; the infant mortality rate was sadly high in the early 1900s. After Elsie joined the babies in the cemetery, the Millhuffs had to figure out how to live again. Like young Tom Nelligan, Elsie's two little brothers, George W. and Reed M. Millhuff, were Renton paperboys. Just a month or two after Elsie died, her mother, Bertha, found herself pregnant with her sixth and final child, a girl who would be named Savilla.<sup>31</sup> By 1910 the family had moved off Renton Hill down into North Renton on Meadow Avenue.<sup>32</sup> Elsie's father William quit his mining job and by

Continued on page 10



This Metzger map shows the location of Van Laar's dairy farm near Hobart, 1926. His name is misspelled once again.

# REAL-LIFE HISTORY

Throughout American history, so many young single men came to the U.S. and became the backbone of the workforce in many places, yet theirs are the most difficult stories to investigate. Jan Van Laar (1878-1951) was one of these men. In February his relative, Marian Steenbeek, contacted us from the Netherlands with questions about his life in the Pacific Northwest. She knew he lived at Rural Route 3, Renton in 1942 and that he had emigrated from Holland in 1908. Could we tell her anything else about his life? she wondered.

As we researched, Marian filled in the details about Jan's early years. His father Gijsbert was a tenant farmer in De Bilt, Holland. His parents were in their 40s when Jan was born, and his father Gijsbert was a tenant farmer. Gijsbert was not in the best of health and died when Jan was twelve years old. Their father's death left older brothers Kees (aged 22) and Hendrik (16) to run the farm. When the brothers started making moves toward establishing their own lives in the late 1800s, Jan began looking toward the U.S.

Jan made several trips back and forth between De Bilt and the Pacific Northwest, making his early years here a bit confusing. (The many different spellings of his name—Van Larr, Van Lear, John or Jan—also complicated the research.) He visited Seattle for 18 months in 1906 – 1907, staying with a friend from De Bilt, Willem De Bree, who had emigrated earlier. In early summer 1908 he sailed on the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, arriving at Ellis Island on June 29, 1908. This time his aim was to settle.

One of the earliest records we found was a 1909 Declaration of Intention to Naturalize for a "John Van Laar," who was working as a logger in Taylor, WA. His distinctive name, his birthdate, and his hometown—De



Jan Van Laar, 1907. (Photo courtesy of Marian Steenbeek)

Bilt, Utrecht, Holland—all indicated this was indeed Marian's ancestor. A Petition for Naturalization told us that by 1913 he was a laborer in Hobart, WA. On October 3, 1913 John Van Larr became a naturalized U.S. citizen. His Americanized name—with a more recognizable double R instead of a double A—was evidence of his desire to fit in.

In less than ten years, John had saved enough to purchase his own farm. Censuses and his WWI draft card show him operating a dairy farm in Hobart from 1918 until at least 1942. He never married, but in about 1935 he was joined on the farm by George Paavola and his wife Ida. George was the son of nearby farmer Mikko "Mike" Paavola, and he and his wife were probably helpful to John as he approached his sixties.

One last mystery: We knew from his death record that John died in Bellingham in 1951, but what motivated him to move from the Hobart area, where he had spent all of his American life? His obituary (uncovered by Jeff Jewell, Researcher at the Whatcom Museum) revealed the reason. It cited his lifelong friendship with Willem—now William—DeBree, who lived in Lynden, WA. Once Jan decided to retire from farming, he renewed his old ties with his hometown friend in a community where many other Dutch lived.

So much can be uncovered from a few bits of biographical information! Marian pronounced herself "happy to know he didn't live and die as a desolate man."

*Thanks to the dedicated efforts of JoAnne Matsumura, Jeff Jewell, David Abernathy, and Jack O'Donnell for helping piece together Jan's story. If you know more about Jan/John Van Laar/Larr, please contact Director Elizabeth P. Stewart at the Museum.*



# MEMORIAL DONATIONS

February 16, 2016 - May 10, 2016

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## GRANTS



First Financial NW Foundation



## INGRESS FIRST SATURDAY

On Saturday, May 7, the Museum hosted a First Saturday meet-up of about 17 avid players of an internet game called Ingress. Trustee Antoin Johnson organized the event, which gave players the opportunity to vie for control of portals strategically placed around Downtown Renton, the library, and the museum. Most had never visited the Museum before, but they'll be back!



Continued from page 7

1914 was the proprietor of the Renton comfort station, a triangular island of a building located in the intersection of Third, Main, and Walla Walla (now Houser). The station sold cigars, newspapers, and other goods to travelers on the Seattle, Renton, & Southern Railway.<sup>33</sup>

The years passed but May continued to be a rough month for the family. On May 13, 1924 55-year-old Bertha Millhuff passed away. Two short years later on May 10, 1926 William Millhuff joined her. He was 67 years old. After William's death his youngest son Reed took over the operation of the comfort station. By 1930 Reed's family had moved north to Kenndale. Almost 25 years had passed but people of a certain age still mentioned Elsie's murder whenever they heard the name "Millhuff."

Elsie's eldest brother George joined the Navy and traveled the U. S. and the world during his thirty-year career. George married but never had children. Savilla, the little sister born less than a year after Elsie died, married Eben Munson when she was just seventeen, seven months after her mother died.<sup>34</sup> They had three boys and ran a resort near Snoqualmie Pass. They also maintained a Renton home for many years.

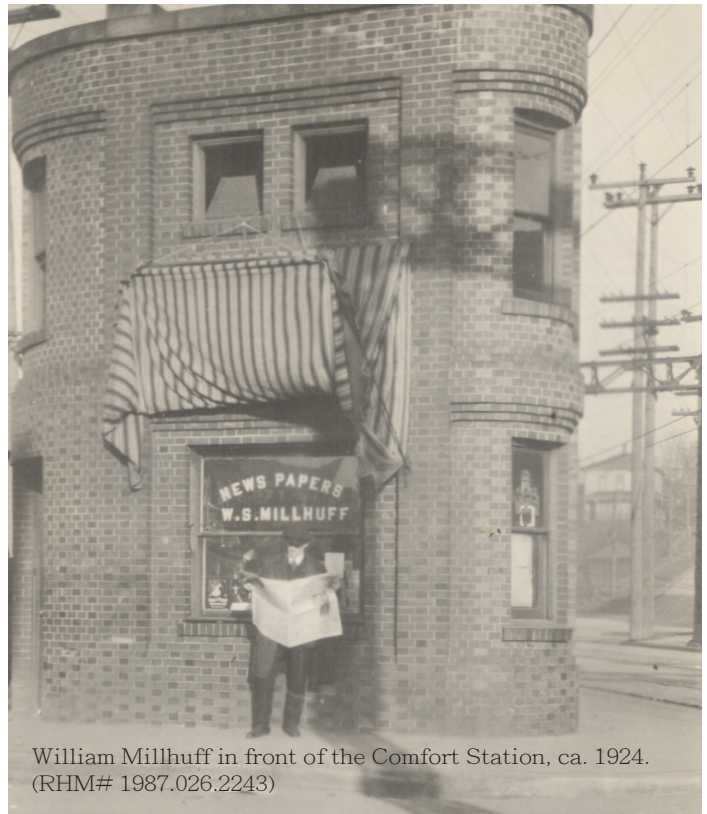
## EPILOGUE

Elsie's murder still ranks with the most horrific crimes to ever happen in Renton. While the murder itself was shocking, it was the lack of a viable suspect that truly threw the town into panic. The fear that the perpetrator was still lurking paralyzed Renton's residents. But they banded together, raised reward money, helped the Millhuff family, and aided the police every way they could; the incident was devastating to the Millhuff and Nelligan families, however. The historical record leaves many holes in the story. Perhaps someday we will find copies of the 1906 Renton newspapers or other sources, and we can learn more about this tragedy from the people who lived it.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 City of Renton City Officials 1901-1978, p.82.
- 2 Renton City Council minutes, 5 Jun 1906. Mazey was paid \$75.83.
- 3 Renton City Council minutes, 5 Jun 1906.
- 4 "Increase Reward For Child's Slayer," *Seattle Daily Times*, 3 Jun 1906, p.1.
- 5 "Youth Is Held On Suspicion," *Salt Lake Herald*, 1 Jun 1906, p.1.
- 6 "Increase Reward For Child's Slayer," *Seattle Daily Times*, 3 Jun 1906, p.1.
- 7 "Tom Nelligan Held As Suspect In The Elsie Millhoff [sic] Murder Case," *Seattle Star*, 31 May 1906, p.1; "Increase Reward For Child's Slayer," *Seattle Daily Times*, 3 Jun 1906, p.1.
- 8 "Stains Caused By Paint, Not Blood," *Seattle Daily Times*, 1 Jun 1906, p.10.
- 9 "Posse At Redmond Seeking Suspect," *Seattle Star*, 7 Jun 1906, p.1.
- 10 "Still No Clue To Murderer," *Seattle Daily Times*, 7 Jun 1906, p.9.
- 11 "Renton Citizens Plan Concerted Action," *Seattle Daily Times*, 15 Jun 1906, p.1.
- 12 "Elsie's Milhuff's [sic] Slayer May Be In Jail," *Seattle Daily Times*, 4 Dec 1906, p.1.
- 13 "Elsie's Milhuff's [sic] Slayer May Be In Jail," *Seattle Daily Times*, 4 Dec 1906, p.4.
- 14 "Takes Finger Marks," *The Ellensburg Dawn*, 28 Dec 1906, p.1.
- 15 "Brute Quickly Convicted," *Salt Lake Herald*, 4 Dec 1906, p.3.
- 16 "The Bertillion [sic] System," *The Ellensburg Dawn*, 24 Mar 1904, p.1. Created by Alphonse Bertillion in France, the system used precise measurements of the head and face to identify criminals. Police kept these measurements on file in order to identify repeat offenders and to tell criminals apart. As time went on, photographs were added to the files; these became known as mugshots.
- 17 "Marks of Bloody Fingers," *The Sunday Oregonian*, 16 Dec 1906, p.15.
- 18 "Digit Marks May Send Hemeter To Gallows," *Seattle Daily Times*, 29 Jan 1907, p.1.
- 19 "Fingerprints Tell Story," *The Evening Statesman*, 11 Feb 1907, p.6.



William Millhuff in front of the Comfort Station, ca. 1924.  
(RHM# 1987.026.2243)



Reed Millhuff inside the Comfort Station, ca. 1930.  
(Photo courtesy of Reed Millhuff, Jr.)

- 20 "Marks of Bloody Fingers," *The Sunday Oregonian*, 16 Dec 1906, p.15.
- 21 "You Did It! -Cried the Criminal's Thumb," *San Francisco Call*, 23 Feb 1907, p.6.
- 22 "City News In Brief," *The Evening Statesman*, 15 Feb 1907, p.5.
- 23 "Mysterious Murder Of Little Elsie Millhuff In 1906 Never Solved," *Seattle Star*, 21 Apr 1916, p.8.
- 24 Report of Movement of Population, Eastern State Hospital, Aug 1938, p.473.
- 25 "Increase Reward For Child's Slayer," *Seattle Daily Times*, 3 Jun 1906, p.1.
- 26 "Another Suspect In Everett Jail," *Seattle Star*, 8 June 1906, p.1.
- 27 Northern Pacific Railway Company Personnel Files 1890-1963, 17 Sep 1913.
- 28 1900 Seattle City Directory; 1903 Seattle City Directory.
- 29 1920 Federal Census; California Death Index, 1905-1939
- 30 Phil Marloty and Frank Storey oral history, recorded in 1978 (RHM# 1978.036.004).
- 31 The name "Savilla" is of French origin, meaning "town of [weeping] willows." It was William Millhuff's mother's name.
- 32 1910 Federal Census.
- 33 1914 Renton City Directory, p.277.
- 34 King County Marriage Records, 1855-1990.

# ANNUAL MEETING



## RHS ANNUAL MEETING

Join your history-minded friends and family for the 49<sup>th</sup> Renton Historical Society Annual Meeting. It's your opportunity to hear what's happening at the Museum and to meet the winner(s) of this year's George and Annie Lewis Custer Award for Heritage Stewardship and our Volunteer Awards. After a brief business meeting, you'll have the chance to MAKE your own personal map of Renton, SHARE your questions about the Black and Cedar Rivers, and GIVE us feedback on 50 years of the Renton Historical Society. Heavy hors d'oeuvres. Please RSVP by June 3 (425.255.2330 or njones@rentonwa.gov).

On  
JUNE  
8  
at  
5:30 PM

### MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please select a membership level:

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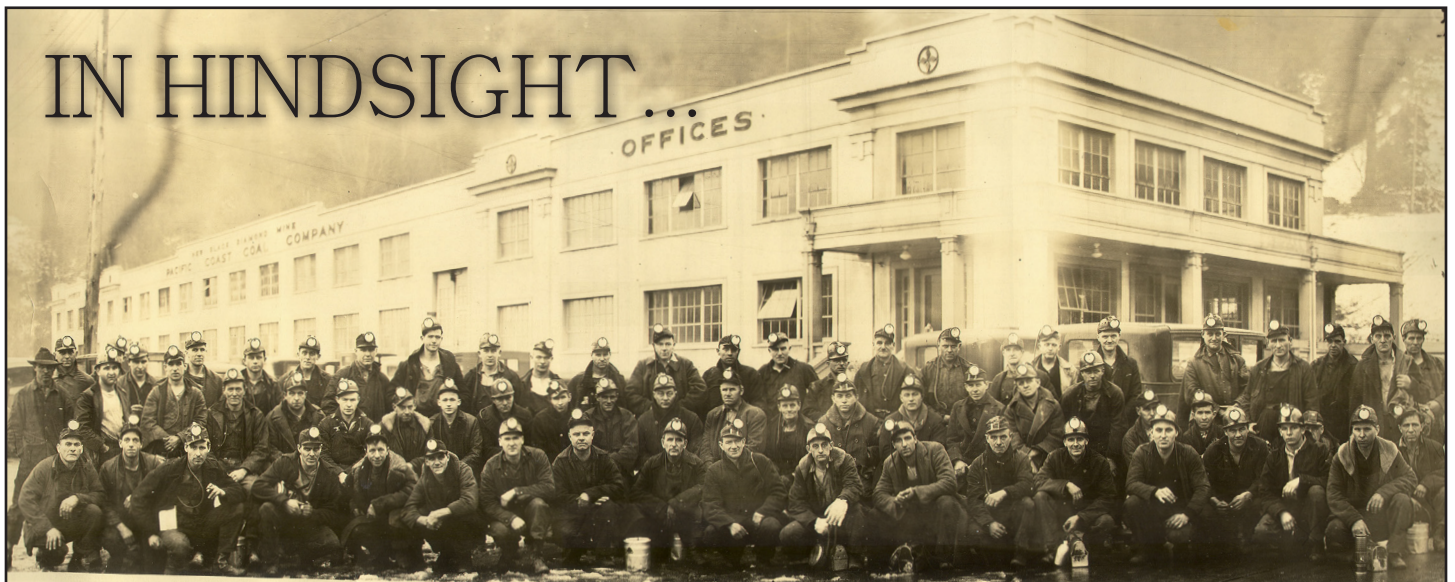
Please make checks payable to the Renton Historical Society.



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The Pacific Coast Coal administration building at 18825 Maple Valley Highway was demolished in January-February 2016. Built in 1927, the building was the office and shop for New Black Diamond Mine until it closed in 1941. (RHM# 1986.041.2241)