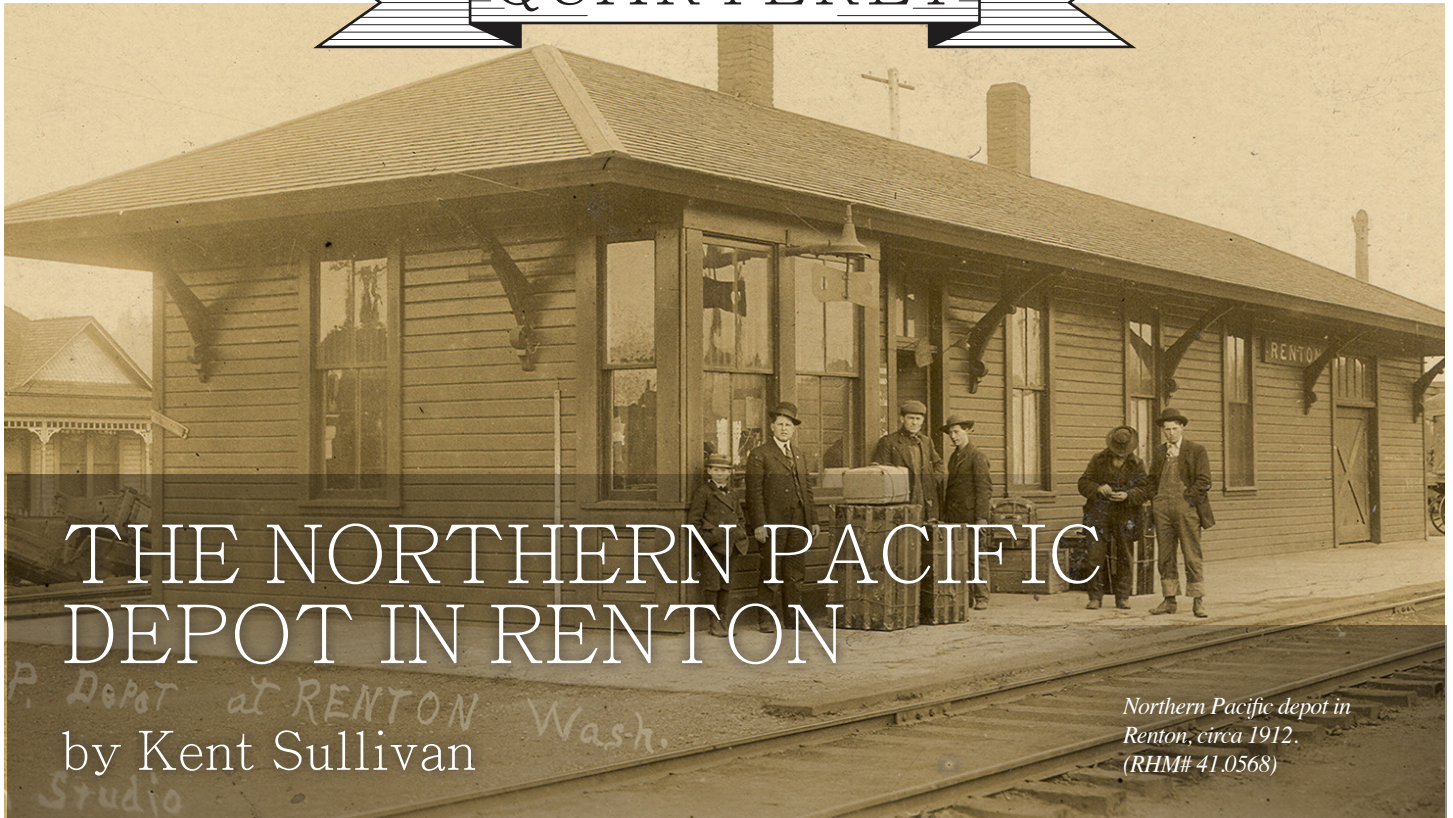


# RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

Winter  
December 2012

QUARTERLY

Volume 43  
Number 4



## THE NORTHERN PACIFIC DEPOT IN RENTON

by Kent Sullivan

*Northern Pacific depot in  
Renton, circa 1912.  
(RHM# 41.0568)*

I live in Kirkland, am a member of the Northern Pacific Railway Historical Association (NPRHA), and am an avid researcher of the Northern Pacific's (NP) line along the east side of Lake Washington, known as the Lake Washington Belt Line and, for much of its history, the 11th Subdivision of the Tacoma Division. I became especially interested in the Renton area after I became the latest custodian of the train order signal that hung on the Renton depot for almost 70 years at the corner of 5th Street and Burnett Avenue. I assumed the story of the Renton depot would be very simple and was surprised to

find it was a bit complicated, and thought that readers of this newsletter might enjoy hearing what I learned.

Documentation in NPRHA files (from the Jim Fredrickson Collection) indicates that the depot in Renton was constructed in late 1906, after final authorization was given on October 25. Elizabeth P. Stewart of the Renton History Museum found the following from the December 1 *Renton Weekly News*: "The Northern Pacific Railway Co. is engaged in constructing its depot in Renton. It is to be somewhat larger than an ordinary box car, but not very much.

Continued on page 5

## Also In This Issue...



**2** *I Am Here*  
| Upcoming exhibit  
at RHM.



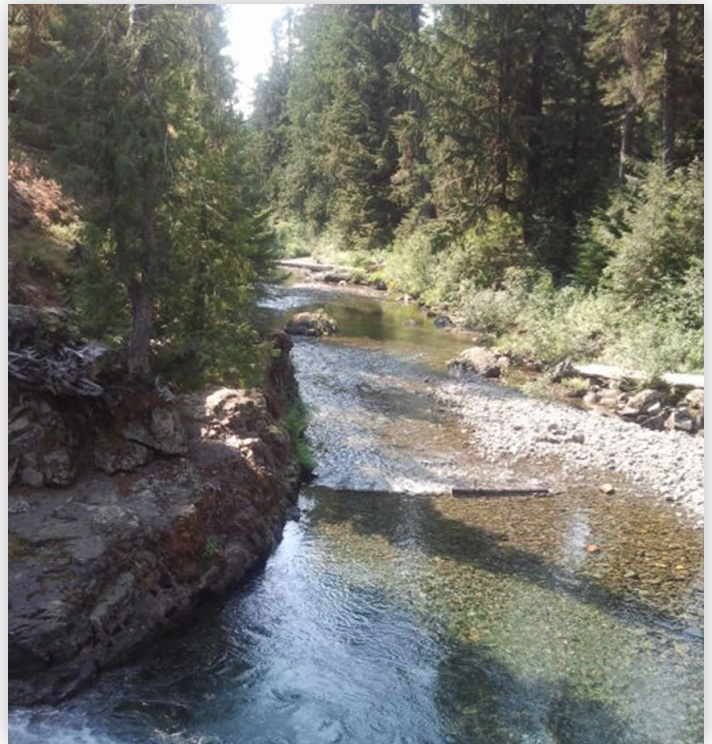
**3** Museum Report  
| by Elizabeth P.  
Stewart, Director.



**4** President's Report  
| by Theresa Clymer,  
Board President.



**8** Collection Report  
| by Sarah Samson,  
Collection Manager.



## I AM HERE: STUDENTS FIND THEMSELVES IN RENTON

When you think of “home” what place are you picturing? *I Am Here: Students Find Themselves in Renton* is a collaborative exhibit created by Renton High School Honors Language Arts students that explores the places that teens love and the historic places they’ve learned about. These young writers share their feelings about the places that make Renton special to them: movie theaters, parks, comic book stores, or grandma’s house.

From  
February  
12  
To  
May  
25

## GIVE THE GIFT OF HISTORY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON!

The holiday season is upon us. Are you still looking for the perfect gift for family and friends? Membership renewal letters have been sent out and each includes a Gift Membership form. Fill it out and give the gift of history! Membership benefits include free admission to the Museum and Museum programs, invitations to exhibit openings and other events, and mailings of our quarterly newsletter.



LIKE US ON  
FACEBOOK  
&  
FOLLOW US ON  
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## DON EMMONS (1935-2012)

One of our most devoted members and volunteers, Don Emmons, passed away suddenly on October 27. Don served as a Saturday greeter at the Museum for many years, and was a loyal participant in exhibit openings and volunteer events; he had attended our annual dinner auction days before his death. A lifelong Renton resident, Don was always willing to share his wealth of information about growing up in Renton, swimming in the Cedar River, picking beans during WWII, and hanging out

with his friends. Don had a dry sense of humor; when asked how he was, he would always answer, “Mean as ever,” which, of course, was untrue. He will be much missed by all his friends at the Museum.



# MUSEUM REPORT

by Elizabeth P. Stewart,  
Museum Director

It's easy to get so caught up in the details of running a museum--raising money, writing grant applications, going to meetings--that I forget about the bigger picture of why we do what we do here at the Renton History Museum. But in October we introduced seventy-two Renton High School students to the history of their community, as part of the preparations for our annual collaborative exhibit. The students' reaction was a good reminder of the significant role that museums have to play in the community.

This is the third year in a row we have worked with students from Renton High, and every time we get the privilege of seeing history through new eyes. This year students are working on writing about their sense of place, comparing historic Renton places with locations that are important in their lives. They spent three class periods here, selecting historic sites around Renton, researching them, and asking questions. Like students every year, they were amazed that things have actually happened here, things that they can relate to and things that are important.

These exhibit projects connect teens to their community in ways they never expected, ways that also remind us about why knowledge of history enriches our lives. Past students have written very moving notes to us about what they learned at the Museum and how those lessons changed their lives. They gain a new respect for Renton and for people who have lived, strived, and struggled here; in doing so, they gain new self-respect, a feeling of continuity with tradition, and the perspective to deal with life's challenges.

There is no substitute for that feeling of connection to one's home. One of our long-term volunteers and supporters, Don Emmons, died suddenly this October. Don was a lifelong Renton resident, so he had many happy memories of growing up here, ones that he often shared. He told me once about his exploits on Renton's railroad bridges; like a lot of boys, he took risks he shouldn't have, risks he later remembered with both awe and fondness. Those happy memories were inextricably linked to particular places, so that whenever he looked up at that tall bridge, he could recall his friends, his city, and the boy he was then.

We hope the Renton High exhibit coming up in February also captures those very personal memories connected to places, because that's a big part of what makes history important to each of us.



Elizabeth P. Stewart  
—  
Director



Renton High School students.

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Karl Hurst  
City of Renton Print &  
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RENTON  
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235 MILL AVE. S  
RENTON, WA 98057

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F (425) 255-1570

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

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



CULTURE

UPCOMING  
EVENTS



HOLIDAY SEASONING!

December 8  
11:00-12:00pm

Storyteller Naomi Baltuck and her son Eli Gerrard share the inspiring holiday stories of many traditions from around the world.



A VISIT WITH AUNT  
HARRIET

February 2  
11:00-12:00pm

“Aunt Harriet” Tubman talks about slavery and her family and friends who risked their lives to help runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad.



THE CHARLES  
MITCHELL STORY

February 27  
5:00-6:00pm

Hear the story of a young boy named Charles Mitchell – how he came to the Northwest and how events almost led to an international incident with Canada.

# PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

by Theresa Clymer, President

Thanks to all friends and family who were able to attend our 5th Annual Dinner and Auction. The night was a big success because of your help in celebrating the Renton History Museum’s past and future.

A very special thank you goes out to Mr. Don Custer who was a marvelous emcee for the evening. Don’s background of being a member of one of our pioneer families and serving as the City’s Mayor gave him a strong arsenal from which to entertain us. We all enjoyed being treated to his many historic accounts of earlier times in Renton. Another highlight was getting scared of course, courtesy of local storyteller Mr. Norm Brecke and his “creepy stories.” This was a perfect way to end the fun and venture out into a dark and stormy night! It was great to share the event with many friends by enjoying the evening with a delicious dinner prepared by volunteer chefs Larry Sleeth and Don Persson. Dinner was served by the Renton Youth Council while we listened to fabulous background music provided by Jazz Horn. Thanks also to the Future Business Leaders of Hazen High School for assisting with our silent auction.

The Museum staff and Board of Trustees worked together to bring a delightful evening to our membership. No detail was overlooked from the ghostly decorations, super entertainment to wearing of costumes. Thanks to each of you for a job well done! We cleared almost \$10,000 to support our mission at this, our biggest fundraiser of the year.

As we move toward the next year, we are in the process of reviewing the results of the member survey many of you sent in. These results have been compiled and we are sharing them with you in this issue.

Please help in sharing in our rich and vital heritage by planning on visiting our exhibits and enjoy one or more of our speaker programs in the New Year. We look forward to seeing you in 2013.

Thank you for your continued support,  
Theresa Clymer



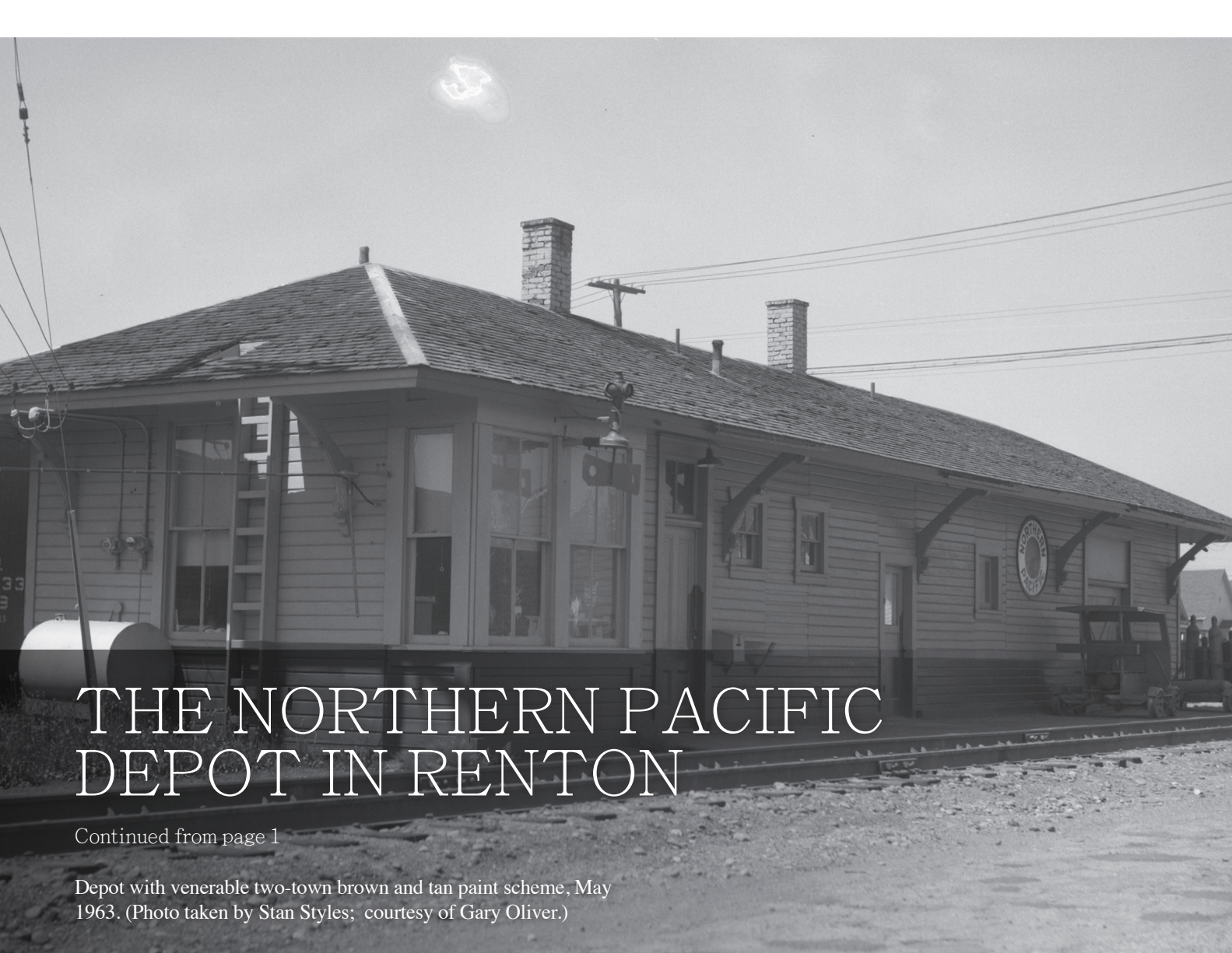
Theresa Clymer  
—  
President



Emcee Don Custer and City Council-member Ed Prince.



Renton Historical Society board member Stefanie McIrvin and Meegan Prince.



# THE NORTHERN PACIFIC DEPOT IN RENTON

Continued from page 1

Depot with venerable two-town brown and tan paint scheme, May 1963. (Photo taken by Stan Styles; courtesy of Gary Oliver.)

The material that is being used came from the demolished depot that formerly did duty at Black River Junction.”

And, indeed, the NP files make it clear that the building material came from Black River Junction, which by that time was located directly across from the main grandstand at Longacres Park. Once constructed, the building remained in faithful service, with only minor exterior changes, until being demolished in late September 1972. Elizabeth found a couple of pictures of the demolition in the September 22 issue of the *Renton Record-Chronicle*.

The Renton Chamber of Commerce office is in the former Burlington Northern (née Pacific Coast) depot at 4th Street and Burnett Avenue, just a block from the NP depot. This depot lived on after the merger that formed the Burlington Northern from the Northern Pacific and Great Northern (GN) in March 1970, because it was better positioned for the track realignment through Renton that the BN did after the merger. (The GN bought the Pacific Coast in 1951 and never operated its own trains on it—instead continuing to operate the Pacific Coast and to maintain the lease arrangement with the Milwaukee Road.) This is the second building on that site. Dave Sprau, retired train dispatcher and railroad historian, explained: “The original depot was a wooden, two story affair built by the Columbia and

Puget Sound, in very nearly the same spot. It was torn down and replaced with the present building. The Milwaukee Road was a tenant of the Pacific Coast and the PCRR agent at Renton was, therefore, a joint agent, but actually the building and all the property and the employment of all the inhabitants of the building was under Pacific Coast Railroad.”

When I confirmed these basic facts with fellow NPRHA historian Dan Cozine, he wondered why the NP Renton depot was constructed so “late.” Because I focus on the mid-1950s, 1906 seemed early to me, but Dan assured me something unusual was afoot. Dan dug into his personal files and created the following timeline, which illustrates the relationship between Black River Junction, Renton, and the piecemeal construction of the Belt Line:

Date	Belt Line construction progress
1890	Mile Post 0 (Black River Junction) to Mile Post 1.93
1891	Mile Post 1.93 to Mile Post 4.57 (Kennydale)
1903	Mile Post 4.57 to Mile Post 7.71
1904	Mile Post 7.71 to Mile Post 23.8 (Woodinville) Completed line turned over to NP operating department on October 24

Although Mile Post 1.93 is not identified specifically as Renton



*Depot with all-white Burlington Northern paint scheme, November 2, 1970. (Photo taken by Jim Fredrickson.)*

in the construction records, that distance is surely within the city limits. And given that Black River Junction was basically in the middle of nowhere while Renton was clearly a town that would originate freight and passenger traffic, it is indeed odd that there was no permanent building to handle that business for at least 16 years (1890-1906)!

Perhaps there is more to the story that we do not yet know, because the way the partially completed line is referred to in various NP operating (employee) time tables is also very odd. The earliest surviving time table is from October 28, 1900 and the depot at Black River Junction is shown in service with a telegraph operator, but the 2-mile section of track north to Renton is not mentioned at all, not even in the listing of industrial spurs. Not until the June 4, 1905 time table does the line show up (as a spur) and then, in the May 6, 1906 time table, as regular track (but no operator at Renton). So one wonders how the NP used the track into Renton prior to 1905, since it was not listed in its time tables and did not have a depot.

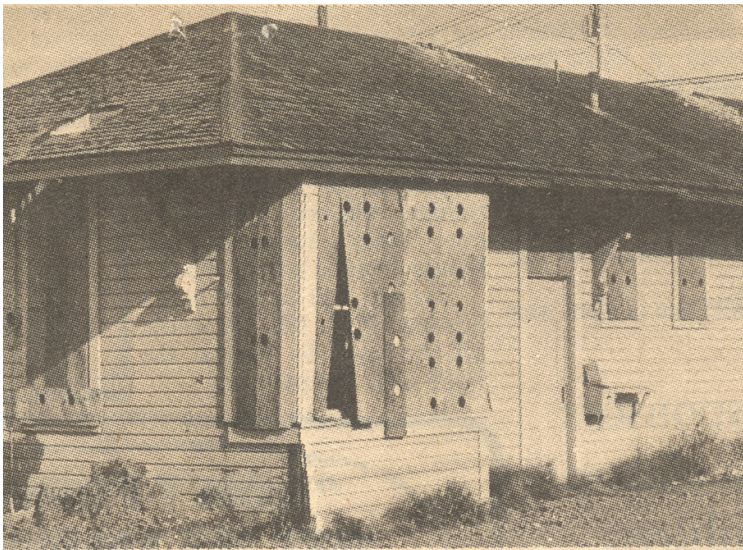
On the theme of seemingly simple actually being complex, we know of five different structures serving as the Black River Junction depot. Before the Belt Line was finished, the depot was not across from Longacres but instead further north, at the connection of the Belt Line to the main track. This

building became the Renton depot, although we don't know whether the form of the building was the same as at Renton, or whether the building just provided raw materials for a building of different design. We would absolutely love to find a photo, blueprint, maps, etc. of this (or any) depot at Black River Junction, before it was moved to Renton!

When the Lake Washington Belt Line to Woodinville was finally opened in 1904, it would seem that the depot would have suddenly found itself in an awkward location due to relocation of the main line, but no records have surfaced to explain what, if anything, happened.

The second known depot at Black River Junction was built in 1906, a short distance north of the first, and appears to have been an L-shaped affair (8'x10' & 10'x14'; 18' x 14' overall). It appears to have sat unused after the third depot opened in 1914/1915, and was finally removed in August 1928.

The third depot is the first one at the Longacres site. According to NP employee time tables, it was opened sometime in late 1914 or early 1915. NP records note that yet another building took the place of this one in 1937. This "new" building had previously been a bridge tender's house in Snohomish. Photos of this building indicate, due to its unusual style, that it was originally built by the Seattle, Lake

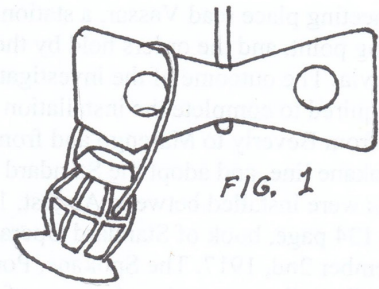


*Renton Record-Chronicle article about the demolition of the Northern Pacific depot, 1972.*

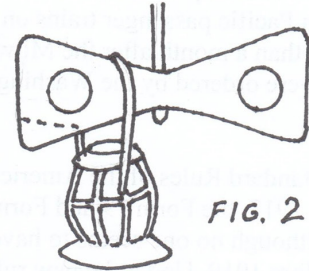
Shore, & Eastern rather than the NP.

The fourth (1937) building would have likely been the final structure for Black River Junction except that it was demolished by a runaway load of logs in 1960. The NP, ever operating in a thrifty fashion, moved the recently closed depot from Lowell to Black River Junction in September, which became the fifth and final depot at Black River Junction.

One final note: Sharp-eyed readers may have noticed that one corner of the “bowtie” on the train order signal [see p. 1, signal is hanging over the travelling trunks] is clipped in the 1912 Renton depot photo. The signal looks the same today. NP and Milwaukee historian Allen Miller believes that this was done to facilitate hanging a yellow lantern on the signal, in addition to the red/green lantern mounted on top. The third (yellow) aspect was needed to account for a Form 19 train order, which did not require a train to stop, but instead just slow down, to receive the order. Figures 1 and 2 in Allen’s drawing show the situation with the Renton signal. Figures 3 and 4 show a much more-common solution to the same requirement.



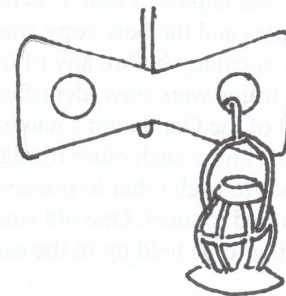
*FIG. 1*



*FIG. 2*



*FIG. 3*



*FIG. 4*

*Drawing of the signal by Northern Pacific and Milwaukee historian Allen Miller.*



*Restored train order signal from the Northern Pacific Depot in Renton. Restored by Kent Sullivan.*



Denny-Renton coal miners at the top of the mine slope after their shift, ca. 1910. (RHM# 1966.085.0775)

# COLLECTION REPORT

by Sarah Samson,  
Collection Manager



Sarah Samson  
—  
Collection Manager

Since late 2010 we here at the Museum have been working behind the scenes to bring you two new permanent exhibits. The project, generously funded by 4Culture, will replace the nearly 25-year old *Big Trees Everywhere* and *Renton Industry* exhibits along the Museum's east wall. Both were showing their age and their replacement is long overdue.

Twenty-six feet of new exhibits are currently being installed. *Renton Cooperative Coal Company* is a new exhibit featuring the stories of a group of miners who formed their own coal company and purchased the Renton Mine. Bucking the trend of ownership by large, often out-of-state corporations, these miners made their own rules, including setting work hours, pay scales, and safety requirements. The exhibit includes many artifacts used in the Renton Mine and also features a DVD presentation including many of the Museum's rarely seen historic coal mining photographs.

Though it still showcases the same companies, *Renton Industry* has been completely overhauled with new historic photographs, new artifacts, and new stories about the people



Sherman tanks built by PACCAR during WWII. (RHM# 2000.127.0967)

who worked in Denny-Renton Clay & Coal and Pacific Car & Foundry. Highlights include the stories of women working for Pacific Car during WWII and the long history of brick-making that lasted into the 1990s.

Another new feature of both exhibits is the inclusion of numerous quotes from our oral history collection. Written on the exhibit walls, the quotes give a first-hand voice to Renton's industrial workers. They tell of the dangers, good times, and changes they went through as they labored for these companies. The exhibits come alive when we allow past Rentonites to tell their own stories. We hope the day will come soon when we have the budget to include audio clips of our oral histories in exhibits.

The Museum worked with two contractors to develop and install these new exhibits: Taylor Felt and Wil Samson. Taylor is a graduate of the Masters Museology program at UW. He specializes in exhibit creation and installation and currently works for the Imagine Children's Museum in Everett. Wil, of course, is our volunteer graphic designer and is responsible for the new design of the newsletter as well as graphics for many of our exhibits. Wil works in the marketing department of Renton Technical College. These exhibits would not have been possible without the talents of these two men.



# MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

August 15 - November 15

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ANNIVERSARY OF  
ED AND GERRY  
FRANCESCHINA  
Madelene Zanatta

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Dorothy M. Finley  
Shane & Jennifer  
Klingenstein  
Joe & Carol Reed  
Rosemary & John  
Sixbey

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Renton Youth Council  
Service Linen Supply  
Wil Samson Design

## GENERAL CONTRIBUTIONS \$100 AND OVER

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Dorlene Bressan  
Glenn & Janet Bressan  
Bill & Carol Collins  
Inez Edlich  
Pop! Gourmet Popcorn  
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CULTURE



# 2012 MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESULTS

By Dorota Rahn,  
Volunteer & Education Coordinator



Dorota Rahn

Volunteer &  
Education  
Coordinator

For the first time in June 2012 the Renton Historical Society (RHS) Membership Committee conducted a Members Survey. The goal was to learn about our members, who they are, why they joined the RHS, what benefits are important to them, and how satisfied they are with the Renton History Museum. We had great participation; one-quarter of our members responded to the survey.

The good news is that the majority of members joined the Renton Historical Society to support its mission of preserving

and educating about Renton's history. The other main reason for becoming a member reflected very personal connections to the past: being a descendant of a pioneer family; being born in Renton or having a family member born here; or having gone to school in Renton.

A few members joined the RHS because they were interested in Renton's history or wanted to learn about their community. Others were involved with the Renton School District and continued as docents at the museum. Some members joined the Society as a way to actively participate in the community, because of membership benefits as well as to network and socialize.

While membership benefits were not the primary reason for joining, we did learn about what services members care about. The majority of members (78%) consider this quarterly newsletter the most important benefit and are completely or partly satisfied with it (91%). For older members the newsletter represents their major connection with the museum, because most tend to be less mobile than younger members.

The survey showed that the least important benefits of the RHS membership are the 10% discount at the Museum store and the Annual Meeting. The most common source of dissatisfaction (12%) was the Museum Store. More concerning was the percentage of members who expressed "no opinion," in some cases as high as 45% (accessibility of research materials).

The vast majority of our respondents are seniors, with 95% over age 51. Although the numbers of those under 50 were small, the survey results point to possible differences in the needs and interests of older and younger members. Younger members are slightly less interested in the quarterly newsletter, and they are more interested in actively participating in Museum events. Younger and older members may prefer our services in different forms, as well. For example, younger members may be more interested in digital access to the quarterly newsletter, the photo collection, and volunteer opportunities.

If our future is to be sustainable, the challenge for the Renton Historical Society and Museum is to attract new members of different ages and different backgrounds. Increasing the number of Historical Society members will be crucial to ensure long-term support for Museum operations, as well as to guarantee that the Museum remains relevant in the community. The Board and staff will be studying these survey results over the coming months as we seek to improve our service to current members and attract new ones.

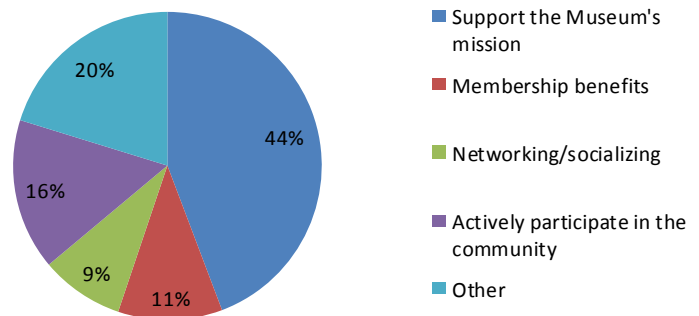
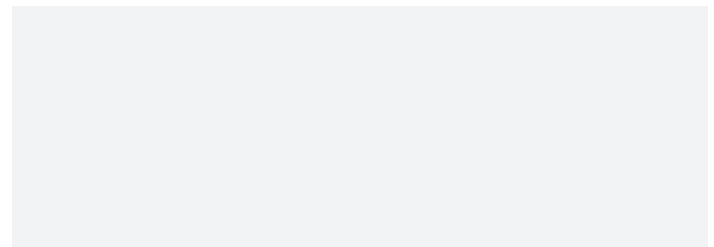


Chart: Answers to the survey question "What are your reasons for becoming a member of the Renton Historical Society?"



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## ROBERT RIVILY (1928-2012)

Robert (Bob) Rivily, born October 23, 1928, passed from this life to the next peacefully at home on September 9, 2012, with the love of his life, Elisabeth, by his side. Bob was the successful founder of B&B Auto Parts, based in Renton. A lifelong Rentonite, Bob is survived by his wife of nearly 63 years, Elisabeth, along with his two sons, Bob (wife Polly) and Thomas (wife Paula).



## NEW PERMANENT EXHIBITS FEATURING RENTON CO-OPERATIVE COAL COMPANY AND OTHER EARLY INDUSTRIES

Come visit the Museum and see two brand new permanent exhibits! *Renton Co-operative Coal Company* tells the unique story of a group of miners in Renton who came to this country searching for better lives. The exhibit features a DVD presentation showcasing many of the Museum's rarely seen historic coal mining photographs. The second exhibit features three of Renton's other major early industries and the people who built them: Denny-Renton Clay & Coal and Pacific Car & Foundry. The exhibits were created with grant funding from 4Culture.

Opening  
**DECEMBER**  
4

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please select a membership level:

- Individual—\$20
- Family—\$30
- Benefactor—\$100
- Life membership—\$500
- Business—\$100
- Senior—\$12
- Senior couple—\$20

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please consider making a donation to the Renton Historical Society.

Your donations help us provide new exhibits and exciting programs!

Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to the Renton Historical Society.

Visa or MC: \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Renton Historical Society  
235 Mill Avenue South  
Renton, WA 98057

Phone: 425.255.2330

Fax: 425.255.1570

Email: [estewart@rentonwa.gov](mailto:estewart@rentonwa.gov)

[www.rentonhistorymuseum.org](http://www.rentonhistorymuseum.org)

RENTON HISTORY MUSEUM  
235 Mill Ave. S  
Renton, WA 98057



Students playing in the snow during recess in Kummer, Washington. (RHM# 1982.037.1554)