

Think About That!

First Savings Bank of Renton: A Retrospective View¹

Part One

By Steve A. Anderson

Foreword

In the fall of 2005, First Savings Bank of Renton will move into a brand new, 50,000 square foot building² on 2nd Avenue. Newcomers to town may look upon its fancy brick, glass and steel façade, with its underground parking garage and perceive it as just another branch of a multi-national banking conglomerate. Viewed by old time Rentonites, reminiscences might abound about the bank's unfettered rise to prominence.

Both views couldn't be more incorrect. The history of this conservative mutual savings and loan organization has been characterized in a number of ways. For the most part, it has been defined by the various locations and structures it has occupied. It has also been characterized

by its percentage of market share or by its ever-burgeoning bottom line - which is always written in black ink.

It was Scott Gaspard, then President of the Washington Savings League, who, in 1992, first compared the bank's past to the now famous Hollywood movie "It's a Wonderful Life." In 1946, director Frank Capra released the film that starred Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. What Gaspard noted then, and what holds true today, is that the film's storyline and the narrative surrounding Renton's hometown savings and loan association often walk hand in hand.³

And sometimes, they blur together in frightfully surreal ways.

At times, the movie's "Bailey Brothers' Building and Loan Association" serves as a dead ringer for the circumstances surrounding First Savings Bank of Renton. At other times, the movie's imagery helps one understand the mood of the time in an era long since gone.

So then, avoiding (as much as possible) discussions of buildings, assets or fiscal growth and market share, let's focus on the real story of First Savings Bank of Renton- the story of its leaders. For it is those five individuals who have breathed life into and then formed (for better or for worse) the organizational culture of the bank - making it what it is today. To more fully understand how this bank has overcome its past to flourish in the present, let us dim the lights, break out the popcorn and start up the projector!

- The Author -



Puget Sound Savings and Loan Officers outside of Wilson & Marlowe Real Estate Insurance Company, 1918.



Renton Historical Quarterly

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Hours:

Tuesday - Saturday 10:00am - 4:00pm
Admission: \$3 for adults
\$1 for children
Always free to members and to the
general public on the first Wednesday
and third Saturday of the month.

Board Meetings:

September 28 6:00pm
October 26 6:00pm
November TBA
Please call the museum for location.

President's Message

By Bob Hunt, President

Capture the Past, Educate the Present, Inspire the Future

How do we take practical action to bring this vision to life? The nature of a vision is that actions can continuously be imagined, executed, and achieved, with the vision remaining to spur on new actions. So where shall we start today?

One of the techniques other institutions use to meet their vision is something called Accreditation. The American Association of Museums has worked out a set of guidelines that help promote professionalism, integrity and quality for any size museum. Among the elements considered are the accessibility of the artifacts in the collection, the environment that they are kept, the documented processes for acquiring, recording or removing items from the collection and the controls the board and the society exercise to assure the assets are appropriately handled.

Accreditation helps us Capture the Past by strengthening our collection process, keep better track of what we have (what Steve referred to as intellectual control) and improve the correlation of pieces with the stories that make them part of Renton. It also helps us Educate the Present, first of course by assuring that we've got a useful collection to work with to tell our stories, and also by guiding us in running the operation effectively.

Accreditation will take some time, the efforts of some good volunteers and some change. But it isn't the only action we should be working on. Many of you volunteer with the effort to record personal histories. That's a classic example for Capture the Past. I've spoken to many people in town who are delighted that their stories are now part of our collection. Those stories keep updating, of course, so this work is never ending.

What else are we doing now to Educate the Present? Our displays should be one element of that. We have updated some of them this past year. We should be doing more with that. One idea might be to dedicate some space to rotating exhibits from other regional museums. We also do a pretty good job with the quarterly in creating interesting stories covering different facets of the people and times of Renton. Our docents are, of course, major factor in fulfilling our education mission. They bring the stories to life with passion and humor.

I get a little stuck when I start to think about how to Inspire the Future. I start to think about the future of the Museum; what that could look like and what foundations we would need to lay down to achieve that part of a vision. I like to think about a facility with enough space for exhibits, collection storage, collection work areas, research areas and conference areas. That's pretty big, but that's just a building. Our mission is in support of the Greater Renton area. How do we inspire that future?

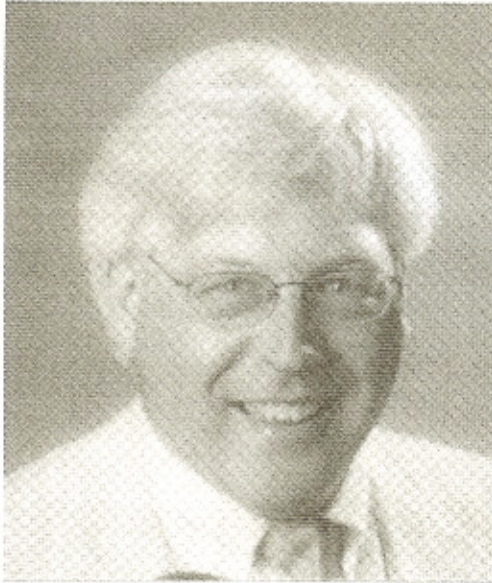
One thing that occurs to me is part of who we are, how we have gotten here and how we will move forward in the future. That is our volunteers. We started out purely volunteer and we are still mostly effective with our volunteers. We have some excellent paid folks, both City supported and Society supported and I am the first to admit that we get far more than our monies worth. But they are the multiplier that helps make the best use of our most important asset and the core of our strength. And that takes me to how we might look at our roll in inspiring the future.

Community services in our city, just like nearly all cities and counties in this state, are facing rapidly shrinking budgets that are slicing off big pieces of the services that they provide. Reduced hours at the library and smaller staffs, tighter budgets for neighborhood events, lower levels of maintenance at parks; these are all choices being made in cities all around us, many with far larger budgets and far bigger shortfalls. Our city has always tried to look forward and assure that this is a city worth living in, but we are facing those choices as well. Maybe the model that we have always worked with, the power of our volunteers, can be adapted to help get our city past this without losing those characteristics that make it a city worth living in. Maybe that is an action that we can consider today to Inspire the Future.

Renton Museum Report

By Steve Anderson

By the time you read this message, my passage as Director of the Renton History Museum will have already occurred. In the twelve years since I assumed the directorship of this public/private partnership we call the museum, we have struggled with many, many issues. We have also succeeded wildly and made substantial gains in quite a few of the behind the scenes issues that the public and the membership rarely hear about.



My leaving is not about personal dissatisfaction, regret or remorse with anyone or about any thing. Rather, it reflects my personal opinion that the Renton History Museum, the Renton Historical Society, and the City of Renton, have grown and matured to the point that they are now capable of handling a sea change of this magnitude without imploding or turning on each other in the vacuum. Dribble, you say? That this could never happen in Renton, you declare? Not true. In my 25 years of museum work within Washington State, I have watched several times as territorial municipalities and immature nonprofit historical societies such as Renton's tear each other apart over "turf" that they image is theirs to fight over. Inevitably, the losers were the citizens of those cities, the true owners of the collection and the history that is kept there.

I have learned through President Bob Hunt that since my "leaving" town in early August, the Society and City have struck new accords with regards to computer services and the forthcoming museum operation agreement - now in its fifth year of rewrites and edits. These accords came about with my leaving - as vacuums like this tend to generate/stimulate meaningful conversations out of a genuine desire to keep things moving ahead in a positive spirit. Given the current circumstances, it is my belief that the City's leadership and the Society's board will strike immediate and meaningful accords regarding the museum that will benefit all citizens within the city.

Further, I have an overwhelming amount of faith in the Society's board, especially President Bob Hunt and the Renton History Museum's staff: Daisy Ward, Dorota Rahn and Tom Monahan. I remain confident that these folks will make the right choices and do the right things during this "empty chair" period. A new museum director is coming - the City has promised that. This person will form new opinions and set new goals that will make it even better for all concerned.

Since there are so many of you, I cannot mention all the people who helped, encouraged and gave me strength to push on during these past dozen years. The cards I received, the notes of thanks, the gifts - all were appreciated greatly and touched me deeply. You know who you are, and what you did - and I thank you for it all. During this time, I grew not only in my ability to manage a history museum, but also in learning the "local history" so necessary when defining a place in this modern, busy and sometimes confusing world we live in.

Finally, I wish to pen a public tribute to Clark Petersen, Library Director Emeritus - a finer mentor, boss and history advocate I have never known during my working life. Clark led me through many intricate mazes - both politically and organizationally. He was my personal mentor in Renton, my friend and hopefully now my new pen pal! He made me, an outsider, feel welcomed from my first day on the job until my last, and he encouraged me to get to know the history of the place, even though I sat in an office filled with Renton historians. He made working in Renton a joy and my one regret on moving to Missouri is that I won't have the opportunity to engage him personally in conversation more frequently.

I have left you all with this two part story of Harry Blencoe's First Savings Bank of Renton. I had never done a corporate history until now. For what Harry and FSBR have done for the Renton History Museum and the Renton Historical Society, I now dedicate this story as a tribute to him.

God's Speed to You All,

Steve A. Anderson
Ladue, Missouri

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Suitcases

There were no brick and mortar financial institutions in Renton prior to 1909.

Long before the marble floors, FDIC insurance, direct deposits, drive up windows, ATMs or passbook savings, there were suitcases. For you see, suitcases were strong, stout and portable – and they took up virtually no space. They could also be easily hidden. B.G. Morrison, a bank official at that time, recalled that folks around town didn't trust paper money; instead they preferred gold and silver coins. One day after Morrison's *Citizen's Bank of Renton*⁴ opened, the owner of a small grocery store on Benson Road came struggling through the front door. Two large and obviously heavy suitcases encumbered him.

"How do you get a bank account?" was the question of the day. "Thought maybe I ought to have one." As well he should have, for Morrison soon discovered that the merchant had suit-cased his amassed life's savings and had been hauling them all around town for the past ten years: \$18,000!

The folks who founded Renton's first bank had perceived a need for a brick and mortar bank institution in town in 1908. Two years previously, a newcomer to Renton decided that the town needed a real estate firm that provided mortgage loans and insurance coverage – all under one roof.

That man was Alfred C. Wilson.

Brothers

Born to Scottish immigrants in Nova Scotia in 1864,⁵ "Al" Wilson ventured west at the age of twenty-four in the year 1888. A hard working Presbyterian who shunned alcohol, he quickly found work in an administrative capacity in a Newcastle coalmine, which was then a "rousing camp and among the [most] populous places in the territory."⁶ While there, Wilson met and worked briefly under the foremanship of Matt Oehm. Alfred's personal demeanor was generally serious, even gruff by some standards. But to those who knew him personally, he was affable, friendly and frequently drew on his dry sense of humor to lighten the mood of the place.

Later that year, Alfred Wilson moved on to Black Diamond. It was there that he met and eventually married his Welsh sweetheart, Annie Evelyn Parker.⁷ Annie counter-balanced Al's gruff exterior by being "a kind, neighborly woman who kept her home spotless and her smile ever pleasant for family and friends."⁸ With their only child Ernest, the couple moved down to Renton in November 1899 where Al gained a position in management with the newly reopened Renton Cooperative Coal Mine.⁹ At that time, Renton was a struggling little village dwarfed in comparison by Newcastle, Franklin, Taylor, Kummer, Ravensdale and other mining towns in eastern King County. Wilson wasn't entirely satisfied with the income he received from the mining operation, so he opened his own small insurance agency in Renton in 1902.¹⁰ Matt Oehm immigrated to Renton in 1905 and became a foreman at the new glass factory next door to the mine. Al Wilson rejoined him there, but continued selling insurance on the side.

Maybe it was the heat, grit and grime associated with factory work. Or, it could have been Oehm's teasing of "teetotaler" Al for helping manage a factory that specialized in making liquor bottles. In the end, however, it would be Wilson's own salesmanship – the insurance business had grown too big to handle as a side venture. So, he quit his job at the factory in 1906. Within three years, John C. "Jack" Marlowe had joined him.¹¹

Jack was born in 1862 at Nortonville, California, the son of pioneers. He arrived in Washington Territory in 1879 as a youth, living first in Seattle and Bellingham, then at Newcastle. Like Wilson, he was also into the business of coal mining. Unlike Wilson, Jack enjoyed laughing and can often be seen in photographs with a huge smile across his face. Coming to Renton in the late 1880s, Jack eventually married Anna Wood in 1891 and was working as a clerk in her father's store when he decided to strike out on his own.¹² Jack had joined Alfred and ten other men in reopening the Renton Cooperative Coal Mine in the late 1890s – which is where the two most likely met.



Right: The Wilson family.

They hit it off right away and by 1909 had formed the real estate partnership of Wilson & Marlowe Incorporated. In Capra's movie, the Bailey Brothers started their building and loan operation shortly after arriving in fictitious Bedford Falls. Similarly, Jack and Al would soon develop a brother-like friendship that could only be severed in death. Their first major coup happened in the first summer they worked together. They were in charge of handling of the sale of the Car Works Addition in Renton – quickly making a name for themselves through out the area.¹³

In thought, word and deed, the duo kept their business niche' strictly in home mortgages, insurance and building loans – just like the Bailey brothers. For a time, Wilson and Marlowe Incorporated was the largest and most well known firm of its kind in King County.¹⁴ Negotiating various property transfers and financing the development of more than a few residential tracts, Wilson and Marlowe Inc., brought profit, enhancements *and people* to Renton. The firm's partners gained a reputation of honorable, straightforward dealing, which made their name "synonymous with safety in real estate investments."¹⁵ Over the



Jack Marlowe and Al Wilson, standing in front of their Real Estate Office, circa 1925.

next ten years their industrious, no-nonsense approach not only made them relatively wealthy, but also leaders in the business life of the town.

By 1918 Wilson & Marlowe Inc. had joined forces with Prudential Savings and Loan, a Seattle banking institution. This arrangement allowed the partners to collect loan payments, savings deposits, and surety bonds and provide loans for the care of property. Through this quasi-banking affiliation, Wilson and Marlowe took in deposits and made building loans right along side the real estate transactions – which dealt primarily with home mortgages and land development deals. And they continued to do very well.

Renton was a going concern in the early 1920s. Increasingly, the partners had a difficult time keeping the insurance, real estate and banking businesses separate. Jack Marlowe had been active in another early Renton bank for some time, so by 1923 Wilson & Marlowe came to a conclusion: Renton could use a good, solid savings and loan bank. Also known as "thrifts", these institutions were by nature rather conservative - which suited Alfred C. Wilson's tight-sited Scottish temperament just fine. As Renton had nothing like it, the partners obtained a state charter and spun off their banking services and assets (about \$2,000 total) from their real estate activities.¹⁶ In doing this, they incorporated Renton Savings & Loan Association (RSLA) under a state charter on July 1, 1923. Alfred C. Wilson championed the role of founding secretary, executive officer and President.¹⁷

Competition, Crash & Change

The comparisons of Peter and Billie Bailey's Building & Loan to that of Jack and Al's banking operation run thick as molasses at this juncture. Each had a small board of directors.¹⁸ Each brought their sons into the business and groomed them for a future leadership role.¹⁹ Each used very limited, folksy, "down to earth" marketing approaches to get their services known. From 1927-29, there are very few print advertisements in the local Renton papers.

This makes one believe that RSLA preferred word of mouth rather than print ads to acquire new members. In the movie, Peter Bailey's target audience was the little guys; largely immigrant, blue collar, working families. RSLA's appealed to the very same segment of Renton society – people whom Alfred C. Wilson knew best. In one of the few advertisements he ran in 1928, Wilson defined who the savings and loan association was for: "...the practical man.... The prudent woman...the young man possessing the manhood and determination to save something every month.... for boys and girls to help them be economical and industrious...for fraternal societies and other organizations wishing to invest...for all seeking a home or who want to improve their property."

In others words, virtually everyone.

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Using these straightforward concepts, Wilson encouraged economy, thrift and saving for the future. It apparently worked, for most of the accounts were small and privately held. And the final comparison: both Bailey and Wilson dominated their niche' in home mortgages and loans in their respective theatres of operation.

Throughout the 1920s the chief executive's son Ernest grew into his own with the savings & loan business. The aging Wilson continued to work with the vigor of a teenager. One observer noted: "[At] eight o'clock in the morning [he] drives up to the office and [is] on duty, with small intermission, until closing time in the afternoon. He [is] careful in his business dealings, prudent in affairs of his own and in those of others. Honesty [is] his watchword – plain, rugged honesty, which makes no claims, yet allows no compromises."²⁰ While this was written about Alfred Wilson, a better description of Capra's fictitious Peter Bailey could not be found. To be sure, Renton's new and relatively small savings & loan association was now successfully competing head to head with two other commercial banks for customers and cash.²¹ Life and the banking business seemed to be going well for the folks at RSLA. Deposits were up and the economy was on the rise. The general mood of the nation was upbeat and positive. In 1928, Wilson and Marlowe moved their business into a new storefront, with Evelyn Wilson and Anna Marlowe hosting the fete in a grand style.

Then the great Stock Market Crash of October 1929 brought thousands of financial institutions to their knees. Again, the scene from Capra's movie comes to mind: depositors rushing the doors, demanding their savings back in cash. But the Bailey Brothers Building & Loan Association had invested and/or loaned it to others and couldn't satisfy everyone. While no eyewitness accounts are forthcoming, one can be certain that a similar scene occurred on the streets of Renton. A "bank run" like that depicted in the movie caused the real life failure of thousands of banking institutions during 1929. Personal savings vanished in the wink of an eye. It was a hard, stress-filled time for everyone. Even today, the generation who grew up during that era look at the world differently from those who came before or after. Bartering for services or goods, bargain hunting, clipping coupons, having ultra-conservative financial views and holding on to possessions represent a few of the recognizable traits. These traits became ingrained in people's consciousness because money was hard to come by. And while some lost all they had, others just got by with what meager incomes they could scratch together.

Again, as life imitated art, or visa-versa, Capra's imaginary bank and Renton Saving & Loan Association both managed to keep their doors open - even through the darkest days (1929 - 1931). Keeping one's doors open during this difficult time would eventually exact a terrible toll on Wilson & Marlowe Inc., and RLSA by the end of 1931.

Jack Marlowe had been experiencing a decline in his health during the latter 1920s – one instance required hospitalization and an operation. He eventually recovered from that scare. And then, on August 13th, 1931, *The Renton Chronicle* reported rather bluntly: "Jack Marlowe is Dead."²² Citing heart failure as the cause, no one factored in the stress that Jack had endured during the previous three years. His health had taken a turn for the worse right after the Crash of 1929 – again requiring hospitalization. Certainly, there was enough stress to go around for the next three years. "Smiling" Jack Marlowe left not only a family and a wide circle of friends, but also a history of civic involvement and trustworthiness that was admired by all who knew him.

He also left his partner and close friend Al Wilson in a deep state of grief and pain. It was later stated that "the death of his old friend and associate affected Mr. Wilson deeply . . . [who] seemed to feel that the end of the road was approaching for him."²³ By Sunday morning, November 1st, 1931 (and in the exact same manner that took Peter Bailey), Alfred C. Wilson's high blood pressure (and his prophecy) caught up with him.²⁴ In one of the largest funerals ever held in Renton, businesses and city hall closed for a few hours in the afternoon. Scores of people from all over the region attended and mourned the passing of Renton Savings & Loan Association's founder and chief executive

Ernie's Turn

In Capra's movie, Peter's son, George Bailey, took over the Building & Loan Association and assumed the chairmanship of the bank vacated by his father's death. In Renton, Alfred and Annie's son Ernest Parker Wilson, did the same exact thing. In real life, however, he assumed not only the critical role of RSLA's next chief executive,²⁵ but also full ownership of Wilson & Marlowe Incorporated.

Active in the community's affairs, Ernie Wilson was viewed as "a product of the schools and playgrounds of [Renton, and] among those of the second generation of Renton men who have made good and who are giving their best efforts to the up building of the town and district."²⁶ Marrying a Renton woman of pioneer stock (Matilda "Mattie" Gunn) in 1915, Ernest girded his position within the community and secured the mantle of a true Rentonian by the time of his ascendancy to the bank's President/CEO in 1931. Going professionally by the moniker "E.P. Wilson,"²⁷ Ernie had been mentored by his father and Jack Marlowe in the "business" of both family enterprises. This being the case, he was not only professionally associated through Wilson & Marlowe Inc., and the Savings & Loan operation, but also personally allied to many of Renton's power brokers. Being an affable, friendly and community minded sort of guy, he knew how to cater to their needs. He also grew quite fond of the good living brought about by these associations. To put it another way: in a time of want, Ernest P. Wilson lived large.

Not satisfied with business success, E.P. Wilson sought the powers yielded only by public office. He achieved this by becoming mayor of Renton for one term (1933-1935). This undoubtedly helped not only his business concerns, but those of his friends as well. When Longacres Race Track opened in 1933, Ernie became a regular fixture. He drove fancy new cars. He dressed well. He had a very nice house and lavished his family and friends with the best that money could buy. He bought a vacation beach home. He undoubtedly tied his business concerns and influence to his leisure activities, a practice that was common for that day and age.

Then, in July 1934, the Federal government passed new laws governing how banks operate. These laws also made bank failures a thing of the past by insuring depositors to certain guaranteed levels.²⁸ About a year later, E.P. Wilson changed RSLA's governing documents from a state granted charter to a federal one.²⁹ By the spring of 1935,³⁰ Renton's only savings and loan had a new name: First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Renton (FFSLAR). This done, Wilson also employed Alameda Shearer and Sylvia (Turner) Knott as secretary and teller.³¹ An active school board member, Ernie found no end to his civic involvement, including a stint on the Selective Service Board His bank continued to prosper and the customer base grew to over 1,000 accounts by the middle of the decade. His real estate and insurance businesses also did very well. He ran for a second term as mayor, because as he put it, "I crave the honor."³² Soundly defeated, he refocused on his family's insurance, real estate and banking enterprises.

Though mourning his mother's death in 1938, E.P. Wilson appeared to have had it all: a new home, a family, church membership, three successful businesses, friendships, lucrative deals in the works, financial and political clout - and apparently an endless supply of money. That year specifically, he was involved in more "up building" of Renton and even provided his own real estate business's storefront with a makeover. He also departed from his father's low-profile approach to getting new customers. Ernie advertised through the local papers to announce the "soundness" of the savings and loan association.³³ In the year that followed, Ernie was badly burned in a mishap at his vacation beach place. For their 25th wedding anniversary, friends and family honored him and his wife Mattie. A virtual "Who's Who" of Renton showed up and congratulated this successful and popular couple.³⁴

Major Developments

At this point in our theatrical presentation, Capra's 1946 movie parallels FFSLAR's history to some degree. In the movie, \$8,000 goes missing due to an absent-minded partner in the Bailey's Building & Loan Association. He accidentally gives the funds to arch enemy Henry F. Potter.³⁵ In 1935, Mayor Ernest Parker Wilson declared somewhat prophetically: "We are standing upon the threshold of major developments..."³⁶ perhaps foreshadowing the calamity that quickly surrounded him on June 19, 1941.

For you see, on that fateful day, federal authorities seized the bank's assets and sealed its doors - and those of Wilson & Marlowe, Inc. Five days later, Ernie Wilson was sitting in a federal jail cell. The Renton press made no mention of these facts, but, as one might guess, they didn't have to. In a town of this size, the news spread like wildfire. Ernest Parker Wilson had been charged with embezzlement.³⁷

The next week's edition of the *Renton Chronicle* broke the news that Wilson had posted bail, and that the bank was to be closed indefinitely. Further, the Insurance Corporation fired all of the bank's directors. Soon thereafter, bank examiners discovered that their earlier estimates of Wilson's misappropriation of funds (\$23,000) had been woefully conservative. Once the examiners had figured out how Wilson had kept a separate set of books, their estimates climbed to over \$257,000, or about one third of the bank's worth.³⁸ For this period of time, these numbers were staggering - the scale of which was put into perspective during E.P. Wilson's trial.

At the age of fifty years old, this well liked former Renton mayor was sentenced to ten years for his crimes. While some old timers insist that he just made a number of bad loans, presiding District Court Judge John C. Bowen had another opinion. He formed the basis for Wilson's punishment on three points: 1) the embezzlement was the largest he'd ever heard of in the entire country; 2) the amount stolen could only be compared to that seized by armed criminals during bank heists; and 3) he had "never heard of a man carrying on a legitimate business and embezzling to the extent of this man."³⁹

Ernest was going to jail.

He pleaded guilty to three of the nine counts charged against him. His good life, cars, gifts and gambling would eventually cost him his job, his family's respect, ten years of his life, (which he spent at McNeil Island and then at Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary), and the respect of the community he had served.⁴⁰



Renton River Days 2005

Once again, the Renton Historical Society and Museum participated in Renton River Days. This year we had a special attraction for children on Kids' Day.



Karen Haas telling pioneer stories in front of the original 1850's wagon

Another attraction was making pioneer dolls with the help of our young volunteers Timothy Hillar-Catello and his sister Natalie Ledvina, sisters Tania and Itzel Pilar, and Natalie Rahn. They and adult volunteers were dressed in pioneer outfits adding to the whole experience. Other hands-on activities included weaving placemats and lanterns as well as making spinning wheels similar to ones that children enjoyed in the pioneer days.

All together Kids' Day went very well, and there were hundreds of kids visiting our booth. The weekend of Renton River Days went a little bit slower. However, we still had people coming by and asking questions or sharing their stories about Renton. Thank you to Shirley Phinney, Ila Hemm, Janene Sestak, Carol Hawkins, Michelle Bouchor, Frank Sutter, Sandy Burkey, Bill Loken, Shana and Nick Straub, and Calvin Yee for donating their valuable time and skills helping at the booth. Additionally, Renton Historical Society volunteers provided festival artists with coffee, doughnuts, and orange juice every morning of the festival at Liberty Park. Bea Mathewson celebrated her twentieth year of organizing and running this service.

Thank you to everybody involved for your help and support. We hope that next year will be at least as exciting as this year.

Right: Bea Mathewson serves doughnuts to festival artists on a rainy morning.



The Ezra Meeker Society in Puyallup let us use the original Ezra Meeker pioneer wagon at our booth for the day. Additionally, Karen Haas, professional storyteller, was sharing with kids songs and tales that the pioneers experienced during their travel on the Oregon Trail in the middle of 1800s.



Museum director, Steve Anderson and the Society President, Bob Hunt, talk to a Renton resident at the booth.

Old Timer Walter Estby Honored

Walter Estby, who graduated from Renton High School in 1922, celebrated his 100th birthday in July by golfing and shooting 98. He was honored by Golf Digest two years ago for having the best swing for a golfer over the age of 90. Walter said he learned his swing by imitating the best golfers when he was caddying at Earlington, a long-closed course near Renton, where he grew up. Walter played baseball and basketball for Renton High School and graduated in a class of about 20 in 1922. He has lived in Skagit County since 1965 and golfs weekly.

Farewell Party for Steve

Museum volunteers said good-bye to our director, Steve Anderson, at a farewell party on August 8. It was a memorable event as we all wanted to thank him for his great work on behalf of our museum. Volunteers brought different salads to share. We made sure that Steve didn't leave us with an empty stomach, as his big appetite is well known. There were some stories shared as well. As sad and confusing as this situation is, we all wished Steve good luck in the future.

Donations

Contributions

**Boeing Gift Matching Fund
Basil L. Simpson**

Contribution in Honor of

**Mr. & Mrs. Ray Thompson
50th Wedding Anniversary
from Madelene Zanatta
(Joanna Scheretz Thompson's father
was a long-time Renton Fireman)**

New Members

**Paula Tran
Mike Peters Family
Shirley Brooks Patterson
Bob & Mary Williams
April Lamirande family
Andi Evans family
Geraldine Dalsanto
Eric Palo
Sol DeJesus
Angelina Vo**

New Life Members

Robert L. Lewis



- ¹ A significant amount of material for this story was derived from an oral history interview with Harry Blencoe, retired President and CEO of the bank from 1961 - 2004. The interview was conducted December 21, 1999 from 8:30 a.m. until 10:00 a.m. at First Savings Bank of Renton, 201 Wells Avenue South, Renton, Washington 98055. Representing the Historical Society were Nancy Fairman, Carol Hawkins and Marian Sutton.
- ² Of this amount, 30,000 sf is above ground office space and the remainder is underground parking.
- ³ "Four Generations, 1 Office" by Georgia Steele, NMN Correspondent, c. 1992.
- ⁴ The bank known today as First Savings Bank of Renton has occupied locations in the 200 block on 3rd Avenue, 916 3rd Avenue, two locations on Williams Street and one at 201 Wells Avenue South. Its new location is at the corner of 2nd and Williams.
- ⁵ "Alfred Wilson Dies in Sleep at Age of 67", *The Renton Chronicle*, Thursday, November 5, 1931. Hereafter cited as Wilson Obit.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ Annie Evelyn Parker was born in South Wales, and immigrated to Scranton, Pennsylvania when an infant. She arrived about the same time to Black Diamond, Washington Territory as Alfred Wilson, in 1888. The couple married in 1890.
- ⁸ Annie Evelyn Parker Wilson Obit. *Renton Chronicle*, 1938.
- ⁹ The couple had a son, Ernest Parker, born in 1893 when they came to Renton at this time. A photograph in the collection of the Renton History Museum shows both Alfred and son Ernest at the Renton Cooperative Coal Mine around 1904.
- ¹⁰ *The Renton Chronicle* "Wilson & Marlowe, Pioneer Real Estate Dealers, Hold Open House" dated February 2, 1928. Hereafter cited as *Pioneer Realtors*. In a later 1939 newspaper advertisement, the E.P. Wilson Company was cited as being founded in 1902, lending credibility to this early date for the insurance aspect of the Wilson family business.
- ¹¹ Jack C. Marlowe came to Renton in 1891 with a booster spirit in his make-up. He continued to work for the welfare of the community throughout his life. Marlowe came to Seattle in 1879, and was one of the first to work in the barrel factory, one of Seattle's factories. He was one of the first on the Waterway Commission and was active in road and public works for Renton and vicinity.
- ¹² In 1891, Marlowe married Anna Wood and later was associated with her father, Robert Wood, Sr., in the mercantile business.
- ¹³ *Ibid.* "Pioneer Realtors."
- ¹⁴ This claim excludes real estate firms within the City of Seattle.
- ¹⁵ Bagley's *History of King County*, p. 921.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.* "Pioneer Realtors."
- ¹⁷ Wilson and Marlow Incorporated was located on the 200 block of Main Street. They started the new bank on July 21, 1923.
- ¹⁸ That Board of Trustees included Thomas B. Olson; John G. Duncalf, Milton Williams, Edward E. Burrows, Evan Raymond, and Dominic Alexander
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.* "Pioneer Realtors." It should be noted that by 1928, Ernest P. Wilson was cited as being the secretary to the savings and loan association, with his father in the role of CEO/President.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.* Wilson Obit.
- ²¹ In the movie, the competition is represented in the singular, evil, corporeal presence of Henry F. Potter. But more on him later in our story.
- ²² "Jack Marlowe, Pioneer, Dies at Age of 70." *The Renton Chronicle*, August 13, 1931.
- ²³ *Ibid.* Wilson Obit.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.* Wilson Obit.
- ²⁵ On November 3, 1931 Alfred C. Wilson passed away. By this time, the bank was a State chartered savings and loan and was operating at 916 Third Avenue.
- ²⁶ *The Renton Chronicle*, "Citizens name Ticket, Indorse John W. Dobson" January 1933.
- ²⁷ Ernest Parker Wilson was consistently referred to as E.P. Wilson in official documents and in the newspaper.
- ²⁸ The Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation insured the accounts up to \$5,000.
- ²⁹ Following the stock market crash, there occurred a bank holiday, in which all banks were closed for a marked period of time. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Federal Government realized a need for more regulation of banking institutions. So, during the bank holiday, the Federal government passed a number of laws that regulated the banking industry. The National Housing Act, which was passed in 1935, provided for insurance of accounts for savings and loans. The government also established the Federal Home Loan Bank system. First Savings Bank of Renton is in that system as a part of the Seattle Federal Home Loan Bank.
- ³⁰ On April 25, 1935, the bank's location was 3rd and Wells.
- ³¹ According to Harry Blencoe, this small core of employees ran the first bank throughout the 1930s.
- ³² *The Renton Chronicle*, "E.P. Wilson Seeks Reelection", January 10, 1935.
- ³³ An example of this kind of full-page savings and loan advertising can be seen in the January 5th, 1939 *Renton Chronicle*. The bank's board of directors in 1939 included: E.P. Wilson, Tom Olsen Jr., Milt Williams, Evan Raymond, E.W. Isackson, Ed Burrows, and Miss A. Shearer.
- ³⁴ *The Renton Chronicle*, "E.P. Wilson in Hospital", June 1, 1939 and July 15, 1939.
- ³⁵ This part was wonderfully portrayed in the movie by the seasoned, yet unmistakably huge presence of actor Lionel Barrymore.
- ³⁶ "Improvements to Feature 1935 says Mayor", *The Renton Chronicle*, January 3, 1935.
- ³⁷ The technical charge for Ernest's crime was "Misappropriation of bank funds." There is disagreement as to whether he "cooked" the banks books or actually kept a separate, second set that detailed his financial discretions.
- ³⁸ Harry Blencoe, in his oral history stated: "It's too bad when you stop to think the total assets of the savings and loan were \$910,663. He had taken off with almost a third, over 25 percent."
- ³⁹ Undated newspaper clipping in the Renton History Museum's Wilson Family file.
- ⁴⁰ Harry Blencoe noted: "When [Ernest Wilson] was released he came back to Renton for a visit with Mr. Theinhardt and I met [him] for the first time. He went back to San Francisco and was hired as an assistant hospital administrator. He was well liked. People in town liked him, even after what he did."

Obituaries

June

Edwina N. Brunette
 Ronald D. Clark
 Kay Nissen
 William S. Lewis, Sr.
 Magdalene Grigel Reigstad
 Theodore A. Sipila
 Katherine A. Shultes
 Durwood Larson
 Helen E. Crutchfield
 Pauline Tomich
 Justin Ruggles, Sr.
 Marie A. Elliott
 Donald J. Kastner
 Ned P. Nelson
 Thomas S. Rosa
 Charles H. Mitchell
 Clara Mayes
 Gladys M. Carr Walker
 Gabrielle (Gayle) Vaudrin
 Mary Postishek
 Harold Macklin

August

Edna M. Samuels
 Russell L. Harr
 Anthony Bernik
 John "Jack" Gibbons
 Florence "Lucille" Downs
 Louella Caniparoli
 Rose L. Gilbert



July

Ethel Klepach
 John P. Burkhalter
 Mary Helen Kennick
 Ray M. Anderson
 Victor Diambri
 Joseph Diambri

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Membership Level: _____

Business Name: _____

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VISA/MASTERCARD# _____ Ex.Date: _____

Your Signature: _____

Please share your e-mail address with us: _____

Please send me a volunteer application form. (32/1)



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235 Mill Avenue South, Renton, Washington 98055-2133

Please Choose Membership Category & Any Donation You Wish To Make:

- Student/Teacher Individual(\$12) _____
 - Senior Individual (\$12) _____
 - Individual (\$20) _____
 - Senior Couple(\$20) _____
 - Family (\$30) _____
 - Patron Benefactor (\$100) _____
 - Business (\$40+) _____
 - Corporate (\$1000+) _____
 - Life (\$1000) *One Time Only* _____
 - General Fund Donation _____
 - Endowment Fund Donation _____
- In Memory of: _____

Total enclosed: _____

Rentonians

denotes former Society Life Member 
denotes former Society member 

Remembered

Anne Repovz Bassett
Ann Hansen

Dorothy Bruce 
Harold Bruce

Marjorie D. Callen
Fred C. Callen

Lou Caniparoli
Carrie & Greg Bergquist

Dale Church
Merna Lasco

Gene Church
Merna Lasco

Lena Church 
Merna Lasco

Mary Copeland
Bruce & Sarah Jane Hisey

Ronald D. Clark
Greg & Carrie Bergquist

Joseph Diambri
Eleanor & John Bertagni; Beth & Mike Potoshnik; Carmel & Don Camerini

Victor Diambri
Gloria Nichols

Betty Hall Eby
Betty Sipila; Renton High School Class 1946 (Gilda & Robert Youngquist, Glennis & Tom Cooke, Lindy & Marlys Aliment, Dick & Corinne Lucotch, Delores Daly, Delores Hines, Ivona Little, Betty Sipila, Dave & Dolores Sullivan, Iris Sutter, Doreen Dixon, Shirley Patterson, Pat & Bill Borek, Bruce & Sarah Hisey, George & Joan Wolfe, Bob & Lois Bianco, Tosh & Tomi Mano)

Matilda A. Favro 
Matilda V. & William Jones

Betty Gieldseth 
Ann & Fred Whitney

Leonard Hogan
Mildred Thurston

Leo Lasco
Merna Lasco

William Lewis, Sr.
Robert & Gilda Youngquist; Betty Sipila; Martha Kingen

Ethel M. Klepach 
Gloria Nichols

Angelina Miller 
Vaughan Miller

Michael Miller
Vaughan Miller

Charles H. Mitchell 
Florence Delaurenti; Mike Rocky; Madeline Donckers; Beth & Mike Potoshnik

Mary Postishek 
Louise George; Dorlene Bressan; Louie & Mary Sutter; Anonymous contributor; Conrad & Mary Ann Pray; Harold Bruce; Mr. & Mrs. Don Camerini; Carrie & Greg Bergquist; Phyllis Webb; Norma Nirk; Mario Tonda; Victor Tonda; Beth & Mike Potoshnik; Gilda & Robert Youngquist; Margaret Bisiack; Neddie R. Farrington; Rose Turner Guild; Catherine Rutkowski; Sibyle (Jean) Gillespie; Gloria Nichols; Scott & Gaye McClellan; Joellyn Richter; Bertha Jordan

Everett L. Sauve
Fred & Pauline Carpine & family

Diana Galiano Shuman
Gloria Nichols

Theodore Sipila
George Burkettes

Grayce Thomas
Vivian Burmester, Mervin Thomas

Pauline Tomich
Martha Kingen

Memorials - \$100 and Over

Mary Postishek
*Bob & Jean Hendrickson
Shirley Moretti*

Renton High School Classmates of 1948 that have gone to the "Happy Hunting Grounds"
Living Classmates of 1948

Centennial Snapshot



This is a photo of the Culinary & Bartenders Union, Local 596, circa 1950. The museum has acquired a lapel pin from this union on ebay recently. Does anyone know the names of any of the people in the picture? If so, call or email the museum and let us know. - RHM Staff



Renton History Museum
235 Mill Avenue South
Renton, WA 98055

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