

# Think About That!

**First Savings Bank of Renton: A Retrospective View<sup>1</sup>**  
**Part Two**  
 By Steve A. Anderson

## Prologue

In the fall of 2005, First Savings Bank of Renton moved into a new building on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. In telling the first part of its history, we used Frank Capra's 1946 movie "It's a Wonderful Life" to help illustrate FSBR's origins and early years.<sup>2</sup> In this second part, we continue with the parallels and discover how First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Renton survived one of the most damning occurrences possible – embezzlement of funds by its CEO. More importantly, we shall discover how new leadership lifted the institution from the rubble of public disgrace to become one of Renton's premiere financial institutions. – *Author* –

## The Master

Trust, integrity, credibility and service. In effect, these are the cornerstones of the banking profession. In the court of public opinion concerning First Federal Savings and Loan of Renton, three of these had been reduced to rubble by E.P. Wilson's financial indiscretions. The forth, service, was not available because of a mandated closure by the governing federal courts and controlling agencies that insured the bank's depositors.<sup>3</sup> So just how in the world could FFSLAR rebound from this situation? Though all the deposits were insured against loss, Rentonites struggled to understand just what had happened. E.P. Wilson's previous civic involvement and popularity made the debacle even harder to comprehend. One thing was for sure: a rapid erosion of community trust was inevitable unless something could be done about it immediately.



*Well wishers sent flowers to the bank to celebrate its recovery and reopening in 1941 following the Wilson scandal.*



**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: Please call the museum for time and location.**



# President's Message

By Bob Hunt, President

With Steve now gone, the last couple of months have been a challenge. I can't speak highly enough of the staff and volunteers who have stepped up to keep operations running. Dorota, Daisy and Tom have each picked up a lot of the slack to keep things running. With all of that, I've come to appreciate how much we need that position filled. Leadership at the museum is the glue that gets things done and keeps things from coming undone. We've had to set a number of things aside to await a new supervisor, and I'll be glad when that part of the operation can be placed in the right hands.

As noted in the insert in the last quarterly, Ernie Tonda has passed away. I never had a chance to meet him, but I understand he was the heart and soul of the society for many years and was the principal driver in getting us from a closet to our present building. He worked for years as the president and then more time as the museum supervisor: all as a volunteer. He lead the effort to establish a paid position in the museum for a supervisor and worked to hire Steve. If the last couple of months have done anything, they have given me a slight taste of the tasks he must have faced, and I can only conclude that he was an exceptional man.

The agreement describing the relationship between the city and the Renton Historical Society has been reviewed and approved by the Society Board. It is signed and delivered to the city for review by the city council. Once the agreement has been approved, the mayor will sign it and we will have finished a process that has been more than two years in work. This agreement allows us to proceed along the path to accreditation with the American Association of Museums (AAM). It also is a significant step in improving the collaboration between the city and the society in developing the museum for the greater Renton community.

Finally, the second part of the First Savings Bank story is our feature this quarter. I was surprised that a subject like a bank could actually bear up as a story of interest for even a single issue, much less two. This bank seems to be built on character in both senses of the word. I did hear from some folks after the first part came out, many with their own memories of the people mentioned. Communities are often colored by the people who make them up, and we seem to have been fortunate many times to have attracted a certain... quirkiness, I guess, that makes this an interesting place to live. For that I am very thankful. I do not think that I would enjoy the blandness that many of the emerging cities seem to suffer from. People like Ernie Tonda and even E. P. Wilson have helped make this place special, for better or worse, and have created a history that is much more dynamic than a litany of dates and events.

## The Stand-in

### Museum Supervisor's Report

As of the time I'm writing this for the Quarterly, we are in the midst of the interview process for a new Museum Supervisor. I thought I'd use this space to fill you all in on the progress.

The city advertised the position both on its web page and in national publications used by various museum-focused organizations. We received some local applicants as well as some from across the country. Some of the applicants have long experience serving in a variety of roles. Others are up-and-comers, with recent graduations (Masters and even a PhD!) and some evidence of leadership in the field. This might mean that the person we choose will be someone who is coming to help us and also developing their own career, so we are conscious that the next person to hold this job may not wish to stay for twelve years.

One thing is certain; this person will have a different skill set than Steve; a different personality and a new way to look at our operation and our future. That isn't necessarily a bad thing, because change will happen in any case. If we are lucky and thoughtful in our choice, we will find someone who will help us as we change; bring a set of skills to our next steps to improve our museum and our service to the community.

The city and the Society Board are working this together, which is how it should be. I certainly can't speak highly enough of the help Brian Sandler of the city's Human Resources department has provided. Dennis Culp has taken the lead in moving our effort forward and Aaron Oesting of the Library has been both thoughtful and insightful in developing our process. Any success we have in hiring a great candidate certainly will be due in great part to their efforts.

The timeline is unclear right now. We are still performing the initial interviews with the selected candidates. That could result in a single, hands-down best choice, or we could require a second series of interviews to further pare the list. It is a good position to be in, having choices amongst some excellent possibilities. As soon as we have a selection we will get the news out. I hope you will come down to greet our new Museum Supervisor very soon.

## Donations

### Contributions to Endowment

\$100 and over

Lloyd & Fumiko Hoshide with Boeing Matching Funds

### Contributions to Mezzanine

\$100 and over

Glenn H. Anderson with Boeing Matching Funds



## Happy Holidays

The Renton History Museum will be closed December 22 - January 2.

## Gift Shop

The Museum Gift Shop is a great place to do your gift shopping. New items and books have been added to the gift shop. There is now a selection of interesting children's books. Gift Shop managers are volunteers Carrie Bergquist and Doris Rahmig.

*First Savings Bank story continued from page 1*

For three and a half months FFSLAR's "restructuring" process ensued.<sup>4</sup> Finally, in late September 1941, they found a person with the "can do" moxie to rebuild the trust so necessary to FFSLAR's viability.

That man was Robert Earle Theinhardt.<sup>5</sup>

Born in 1883 in Nebraska, Theinhardt first came out west in 1910 where he found employment as the manager of a land improvement company in Helena, Montana. By 1929, he and his wife Mary had migrated to Seattle where he entered the banking profession. There, he rubbed shoulders with the titans of Seattle's pioneer banking elite – including a personal friendship with Joshua Green.<sup>6</sup> Theinhardt's opinionated and conservative manner, plus his experience as treasurer, appraiser and vice President at the Northern Savings and Loan in Seattle landed him the job at FFSLAR. However, reestablishing trust for an "institution disgraced"<sup>7</sup> was to provide this corn husker with more than a job. It would become a way of life and would, for better or for worse, earn him and the bank a reputation. A *Record-Chronicle* article said it best: "Mr. Theinhardt was known for his outspoken views."<sup>8</sup> No shrinking violet, Theinhardt's personality would permeate and influence every aspect of the bank's operation for decades to come.

Having an influential board of directors consisting of local, prominent business men - all known to Renton's citizens – accelerated the recovery process, but even that occurred too slow for Theinhardt. Timing, of course, is everything. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor plunged the nation into war three months following Theinhardt's appointment to the job of CEO/President. The combination of his outspoken, yet conservative banking views and the infusion of federal war industry payrolls into Renton's economy kicked the bank's recovery into high gear.<sup>9</sup> Within a year of Theinhardt's hiring, the institution broached the \$1,000,000 mark in assets. Throughout World War II, Theinhardt worked himself and his small staff nearly to death.<sup>10</sup> He did this not only to bring back the public's trust, but also to meet the demands of a fivefold expansion of Renton's labor base. One other fact that benefited Theinhardt's plan: the newcomers knew nothing of the institution's troubled past.

During the war years, Theinhardt and the board of directors utilized every opportunity to improve FFSLAR's image. Abandoning E.P. Wilson's extravagant advertising strategy, they reintroduced the conservative "low key" style that had worked so well in Alfred C. Wilson's time. FFSLAR's credibility was gaining traction.

In March 1945, Theinhardt and company leaked an announcement to the press: "A Renton owned and operated bank will open for business on or about July 1<sup>st</sup> [and will be] modern in every respect."<sup>11</sup> This "commercial" bank operation, to be spun off from the savings and loan, was to be called **First National Bank of Renton (FNBR)**. Leading up to the opening, emphasis was placed on the "home-owned" and "strictly local" nature of the institution. First National Bank's governing board of directors (nearly a mirrored image of FFSLAR's board) was to be overseen by a new chief executive officer (surprise!), Robert E. Theinhardt. This new commercial bank was located physically right next door to (but within the same building as)<sup>12</sup> FFSLAR, making logistics easier for everyone involved.<sup>13</sup>

But the expanded needs of the two institutions could not be met. So a new building was built on Williams Street.<sup>14</sup> The board of directors soon realized that running both a commercial bank and a savings & loan was taxing Theinhardt's abilities to lead. Therefore, the presidency of the commercial bank was shifted over to one O.K. Moody, while the savings & loan remained under Theinhardt's leadership.

In the fall of 1945, Boeing started laying off thousands of workers at their Renton plant. Renton's business leaders knew that the artificially high demands being placed on the town's financial community during the war came from Boeing and Paccar's government payrolls.<sup>15</sup> Speculation filled the air as to how First Federal Savings & Loan Association of Renton and the new FNBR might fair in a softer, post war economy. They didn't have to wait long to find out. As soldiers returned from the service, the Federal Government offered them 100%, 20-year mortgage loans. This meant that servicemen needed no collateral and that the government backed each loan. At the heart of Theinhardt's FFSLAR was the home mortgage business. The upswing in home mortgages carried FFSLAR and FNBR through the latter 1940s with a steady growth of customers and total assets.

## Opposing Views

A not-so-surprising sidebar to this story is that not everyone saw the world through Theinhardt's ultra conservative and opinionated spyglass.<sup>16</sup> There were those in town who began referring to the outspoken CEO as "Flintheart". They made jokes about his conservative and often inflexible views.<sup>17</sup> This backlash was not only in reaction to Theinhardt's personality, reputation, and penny-pinching ways – but also a statement about the bank's loaning policies. On the one hand, these conservative policies kept the savings and loan in the black. On the other, they kept the bank out of reach for some Rentonites.

While there are a number of stories circulating within town concerning this condition, Homer Venishnick's experience is perhaps representative of what did happen. He remembered a time when he ventured to obtain a home loan to build on Talbot Hill. Theinhardt asked numerous questions of young Homer such as if he'd ever built, wired, roofed or plumbed a house before. Homer, certain that he could master those skills but being honest, indicated "no" to all of the above. Theinhardt denied Venishnick the loan, who immediately withdrew his savings from the bank and built the house anyway using a competitor's loaned funds.<sup>18</sup>

The bank's philosophy on loaning money was once crystallized by someone we're going to introduce in the next section, Theinhardt's understudy - Harry A. Blencoe, who stated: "If [the person requesting couldn't] afford a loan, we will tell him no, or we tell him to borrow a lesser amount and buy a smaller house. When we see someone come in [with] twelve credit cards our loan officer will give them a lecture about having too many [and make them] destroy ten of the cards. Too much debt is like too much liquor."<sup>19</sup> Apparently, the disparate views held by some Rentonites concerning this institution indicates that some people don't appreciate being lectured by bankers.



*Robert Earl Theinhardt*

## The Apprentice

Life tumbled along during the post war years for the commercial bank and the savings and loan association now jointly managed by FFSLAR's hierarchy. Again, Capra's fictitious Bailey Building and Loan and Renton's savings and loan storylines blur slightly around 1950. In the movie, a war hero and navy flyboy named Harry returns home to Bedford Falls – with all hoping that he will become Bailey Brothers Building & Loan Association's next CEO/President. In Renton, a navy flyer also named Harry enters the picture after the war, and this one wears a Distinguished Flying Cross and two other medals to his credit.<sup>20</sup> Attending the University of Washington on the GI Bill, Harry A. Blencoe enrolled in the School of Economics wherein he attended classes on banking, finance, insurance and real estate. During this time, he lived in the University District, as did his future wife, Janet.<sup>21</sup>

Directly out of college, Blencoe happened into Renton one day and met Bob Theinhardt. To state that the two hit it off would be a gross understatement.<sup>22</sup> In the fictitious movie, Harry Bailey doesn't stick around long. But in the real world story of Renton's savings and loan association, Harry B. got a job that would forever change his life and that of the bank.

*First Savings Bank story continued on page 6*

*First Savings Bank story continued from page 5*

At that time Robert E. Theinhardt was in his element: busily cranking out GI home loans, which had become the bank's "bread and butter." He grabbed hold of young Blencoe like a sculptor would a pile of clay. Plying Harry<sup>23</sup> with his own brand of savings & loan doctrine, Robert T. espoused the qualities and fiscally conservative nature of thrifts. He directed young Harry through the maze of intricate banking activities - each laced with a system of belief that had helped the institution recover in the early 1940s. First, Harry did teller work. Then, he posted checks and handled deposits. After that, on to loan applications, notes of deeds of trust and full blown mortgages. He then graduated to contracts, appraisal of properties, title insurance and closing real estate deals. When the janitor fell sick, Blencoe mopped the floors and weeded the planters. As Theinhardt's understudy, Harry did everything. Most importantly, he internalized Theinhardt's theory that "profit is saved when you don't have to hire out." "Tight as a tick" goes the saying.<sup>24</sup>

Rather abruptly, the commercial bank, along with the building containing the savings and loan association, was put up for sale in the middle 1950s. Seattle-First National Bank<sup>25</sup> acquired the property and promptly canceled the lease for FFSLAR - effectively throwing them into the street. Not to be completely put out, FFSLAR moved across the street and continued on with their business.<sup>26</sup> By 1957 Blencoe had memorized Theinhardt's doctrine verbatim. In recognition, he was advanced to the post of Executive Vice President. In 1959 he qualified for a seat on the Board of Directors. And it was in January 1961 that Harry A. Blencoe succeeded Robert Earle Theinhardt as CEO/President of the savings and loan.<sup>27</sup> Theinhardt subsequently moved to the position of Chairman of the Board.<sup>28</sup>

## The Harry Factor

A proponent of technological advancement, Harry Blencoe ushered FFSLAR into the computer age - using machines instead of pens and pencils to do their postings by the late 1950s. He diligently work to extend the credibility that Theinhardt had worked so hard to reestablish - following the teachings and style exactly as The Master had taught it.<sup>29</sup> By the late 1960s, the bank was on the move again, this time to its most recent location - 2<sup>nd</sup> and Wells.



*Harry Blencoe standing in front of First Savings Bank of Renton at 201 Wells Avenue South, June 1996.*

To once again utilize FFSLAR's comparison to Capra's fictitious building and loan, we now turn to the primary villain of "It's a Wonderful Life", Harry F. Potter. This physically large, entrenched, and obviously wealthy individual owned the "corporate bank" in Bedford Falls. He probably owned a number of other properties as well and openly despised the working class of Bedford Falls as "rabble." Potter very much wanted to buy out the small Bailey Building and Loan, which he perceived as a thorn in his side. After doing that, he planned to disassemble Bailey's bank to the point of obscurity.

The banks founded in Renton during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had gained enough prominence by the 1960s and 1970s to become targets for Potter-like mergers and corporate takeovers. When the Boeing Company plummeted financially and cut 40% of its workforce in the early 1970s, these big banks sprang on Renton's struggling financial community. Hit hard by the Boeing layoffs, many were absorbed or closed entirely. New branch offices of larger corporate banks replaced them. Remarkably, FFSLAR once again held its ground and dodged the bullet.

A major factor helping FFSLAR was the fact that it only had one corporate office, with no leases or ballooning overhead costs to service. As Blencoe likes to tell it: "[Renton's other pioneer banks had] all been sold and merged and gobbled up. I admit I would benefit more [financially] than anybody [if we sold out]. I have been offered everything under the sun to merge but I say no [for it would hurt service to the community]." George Bailey shared Blencoe's opinion and vigorously opposed Potter's merger attempts. As George stated: "'Just remember this, Mr. Potter, that this rabble you're talking about. They do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath? Anyway, my father didn't think so. People were human beings to him, but to you, a warped, frustrated old man, they're cattle. Well, in my book, he died a much richer man than you'll ever be."

Both George and Harry held out on principle and eventually withstood the corporate temptations that threatened their existence. Though Renton's savings and loan survived that round of takeovers, it lost Robert Earle Theinhardt who passed away in 1975. The loss of the man who had brought the bank back from ruin was felt deeply throughout the Renton community.<sup>30</sup>

In 1977, an heir apparent for the CEO/President's chair appeared on the scene. Blencoe undoubtedly schooled Victor Karpiak in Theinhardt's fiscal theories and doctrine. Further, he was no doubt thoroughly tutored on the bank and the community it serves. But Victor had little time to prepare for the next big challenge: savings and loan institutions across the nation were folding like a house of cards. The culprit: junk bonds. Because of changes in the federal government's regulations concerning savings and loans, junk bonds had become the tool by which those kinds of institutions stayed solvent. Unfortunately, junk bonds are called that because they can figuratively turn into worthless garbage. However, because of old "Flintheart's" ultraconservative views on the subject, junk bonds could never have become even a minuscule percentage of FFSLAR's portfolio. No way, no how, no never. Because of this fact, FFSLAR sailed through the S & L debacle of the early 1980s without a hitch.

That tragedy, however, linked the idea of bad investments to the "savings and loan" industry. This was FFSLAR's industry – and connected to it by charter, name, word and deed. Harry Blencoe remembered: "We survived all of [the S & L junk bond debacle] with flying colors. Nevertheless, the savings and loan [industry now] had a stigmatism, and we felt we wanted to get away from ... the problems [of] 1980, 1981 and 1982."

So, once again, in 1992 the thrift's charter was reformed. The old name of First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Renton was abandoned. A new state charter was drawn up and a significantly shortened **First Savings Bank of Renton (FSBR)** emerged.<sup>31</sup> No shrinking violet himself, Harry Blencoe is quick to point out that FSBR has been involved in numerous land deals in town, and at times he has used his influence to help shape the future of Renton. Safeway's new superstore; Walgreen's Drug Store; Dally Renaissance Apartments; the new Renton City Hall and Maplewood Golf Course all have Harry and FSBR fingerprints all over them. These major works, along with literally hundreds of residences, building developments and home loans remain as a legacy of Robert Theinhardt, Harry Blencoe and now Victor Karpiak, who succeeded Harry as the bank's President in 1998 and CEO in 2004.

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*First Savings Bank story continued on page 8*

## Epilogue

Whether one swears by their service or swears at them verbally, one cannot deny that the people of First Savings Bank of Renton have beaten the odds. Based on its huge market share, hundreds of millions of dollars in assets and rock solid performance, one must accept the fact that the bank has succeeded wildly where others have experienced diminished capacity. When Frank Capra first released his movie in 1946 it was a commercial failure. Then, a new generation discovered it, and bestowed upon it true "classics" status. One could say that FSBR has turned out to be Renton's version of a "classic" banking institution.

What may not be as obvious is the perception that each of the bank's leaders (in one way or another) have progressed the bank to the "independent as a pig on ice" level of success that it enjoys today. Alfred Wilson's contribution was establishing the bank and setting high standards for its performance in the 1920s. Alternately, his son, Ernest Wilson at first increased the bank popularity and asset count, and then plunged the bank into a public relations nightmare from which few banks can recover. But Ernie's downfall created an environment that demanded nothing less than the hard driving, opinionated and forthright Robert Earle Theinhardt. Theinhardt's personality, like it or not, was instrumental in developing the foundational building blocks on which the bank could mature and survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. His successor, Harry Blencoe withstood numerous temptations to sell out to bigger corporate banks. He also helmed the bank through several cyclical downturns at Boeing and broached the 1980s saving and loan debacle in tact.

To be sure, current CEO/President Victor Karpik's turn at the helm faces challenges that can only be speculated upon. But if we can learn anything from this analogy between a real world bank and a Hollywood fairy tale, its this: You don't have to be a mega-conglomerate financial institution to make an impact on the community; the hero always gets the gal and; those who set a course and stay with it generally succeed. And isn't that wonderful?

- <sup>1</sup> A large portion of 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.
- <sup>2</sup> For the full review of IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, please go to <http://www.reelclassics.com/Movies/Wonlife/wonlife3.htm>. The original movie was based on an original story by Philip Van Doren Stern, which the author enclosed with his Christmas cards in 1943 and privately published in 1945. In addition to the original story and the famous film, IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE has been remade as a radio adaptation (*Lux Radio Theatre*, 10 March 1947) in which Stewart and Reed reprised their performances, and a 1977 made-for-television movie (re-titled "It Happened One Christmas") starring Marlo Thomas. The 1946 film was colorized in the late 1980s by both Hal Roach Studios and American Film Technologies, whereupon Frank Capra commented, "They ruined it. They splashed it all over with Easter-egg colors and they ruined it. Even the villain looks pink and cheerful." (*Newsweek*, 27 June 1988, page 19).
- <sup>3</sup> These agencies included: the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation and the Federal Home Loan Bank.
- <sup>4</sup> Later articles surrounding the bank would tend to gloss over this period as one of "restructuring", a euphemism for the time it took for Federal investigators to look through the bank statements, conduct a full audit, fire and hire a full board of directors and find a replacement CEO/President. These same articles usually failed to mention the embezzlement, arrest and imprisonment of the chief executive, but old timers in town generally remembered the period as a painful one for all concerned with the bank.
- <sup>5</sup> They also appointed new bank directors, all of whom had close personal and business ties to Renton. The new directors were: Floyd Lawrence, Fire Chief; Charles Plash, ten cent store owner; Warren Williams, laundry owner; Alex Peltó, J. C. Penney manager; Hayden Williams, auto dealership; John H. Swanson, auto dealership;
- <sup>6</sup> Green, Joshua (1869-1975). For more on the founder of Seattle's People's Bank and Trust Company, see HistoryLink Essays at [http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=1689](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=1689).
- <sup>7</sup> These are the words Robert Theinhardt used to describe the S & L to the shareholders in his 1945 address.
- <sup>8</sup> "Robert Theinhardt, Banking Pioneer, Dies." *The Record-Chronicle*, 29 October 1975.
- <sup>9</sup> The Boeing Airplane Company had just come to town and the Pacific Car and Foundry had begun the production of Sherman tanks. Both employers were running three shifts per day - resulting in more demand for cashed payroll checks.
- <sup>10</sup> These were the words used by Harry Blencoe, in recalling Theinhardt staff's workload.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Renton Chronicle*, March 15, 1945.
- <sup>12</sup> The new bank location was at 913 Third Avenue. The savings and loan was at 916 Third Avenue.
- <sup>13</sup> According to the March 22, 1945 *Renton Chronicle* article, "This bank will occupy quarters in the First Federal Bank Building, which was recently purchased by Dan McGovern. It is to be capitalized at \$100,000 with \$20,000 surplus and \$15,000 undivided profits." In his 1945 address, Bob Theinhardt denies accusations that the new bank will replace the older, yet smaller savings and loan - although one might look at this juncture and consider that the thought probably did cross his mind and that of the board of directors.
- <sup>14</sup> 311-313 Williams Street South.
- <sup>15</sup> It was assumed the pace would back off once the war had ended.
- <sup>16</sup> Renton has a sharply divided opinion of this bank, even in 2005. While some love it and wouldn't bank anywhere else, other rue the institution's existence.
- <sup>17</sup> Vic Tonda related a story to the author recently about Theinhardt's tight nature. Once Robert Theinhardt brought in an clothing iron to a local electrical/hardware shop to have the cord replaced. He dropped off the iron and then, a week or so later came to pick it up. When he learned that it would cost \$3.50 he balked at paying which he said was too much. The shop's owner reached under the counter pulled out a wire cutter, cut the new line and plug and told Theinhardt to take his iron home, no charge.
- <sup>18</sup> Since that time, we've learned that Homer recently approached the bank again and this time was accepted.
- <sup>19</sup> Blencoe Oral History.
- <sup>20</sup> In the words of Harry Blencoe, "I saw a lot of action [and] I'm lucky to be here." Harry Blencoe indicated that during WW II, he was in the Navy Air Corp. Joining right after Christmas in 1942 during his Bothell High School Christmas break; Harry would spend three years in the Pacific theatre of War.
- <sup>21</sup> They wed on September 24, 1950.
- <sup>22</sup> Numerous sources within the Renton community indicate that Harry Blencoe was practically adopted by the Theinhardt family and treated him as a family member.
- <sup>23</sup> Who earned just \$225 per month.
- <sup>24</sup> Theinhardt's classroom taught Harry Blencoe principles that he holds fast to, even today.
- <sup>25</sup> This has morphed by 2005 into Bank of America.
- <sup>26</sup> "This new location was at 306 Williams Street, next door to the post office, two doors north. There was a little doctor's office in between and the Renton Hardware was next door. We moved over there and opened that office July 1, 1956. That was June 30, 1956 moved into the next to Post office." Harry Blencoe oral history.
- <sup>27</sup> Blencoe noted: "I was the youngest President of a savings and loan in the State of Washington at that time."
- <sup>28</sup> Bob Theinhardt would continue to reside on the board of directors in one form or another until 1971. He was known to frequent the bank during that period. The Theinhardt's then moved to California for a while, but returned to reside in Renton.
- <sup>29</sup> Harry has been described as "a nicer, kinder" version of Theinhardt by some Rentonites.
- <sup>30</sup> "Robert Theinhardt, Banking Pioneer, Dies." *The Record-Chronicle*, 29 October 1975. He died on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1975
- <sup>31</sup> Harry Blencoe indicated: "We are now licensed by the state, we are examined by the state and also Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation as well as other auditors and examiners."



## A Concert for Kids



This event, held Saturday, December 3, was an effort to introduce the youngest citizens of Renton to the history of our region and to the ethnic diversity of people living in the area. At the same time we wanted children to start celebrating the holiday season.

The day before the occasion, the Volunteer Committee decorated the old house at the museum with greens and put up a Christmas tree. Larry Sleeth, Renton Historical Society board member, brought foam flooring for kids to sit on. Everything became very red, gold, white and green in the back of the museum. Just the proper environment for celebrating the holidays.

The next day, Allan Hirsch, storyteller and musician, presented "A Concert for Kids". During the concert he introduced multi-cultural American folklore and legends, historical ballads, old time songs, games,

tall tales, Native American tales, African American tales, riddles, and more. Allan brought and demonstrated different kinds of whistles and other instruments from all over the world. Kids and their parents sang songs, participated in stories and had fun.

After the concert, holiday cookies were served. Additionally, children made ornaments such as snowmen, reindeers and garlands. They liked them so much that most of them took their decorations home. Some shared them with the museum by leaving them for our tree. It was fun for the people who came, and for those who organized the event as well.

In the future we plan on organizing events for children one Saturday each month. Please keep checking the *Renton Reporter* or *Seattle's Child* magazine for a description. We hope that our members will bring their children and grandchildren to our museum to continue the tradition of being involved in Renton history. We promise to make those events educational and fun for everybody.

## 2005 Holiday Party

On December 12th members of the Renton Historical Society and Museum volunteers celebrated the holidays at the Carco Theater. The Volunteer Committee prepared delicious hors d'oeuvres including meatballs, cheeses and as vegetable fruit platters. Homemade cookies topped the menu.

Everybody socialized for a while before having an opportunity to participate in a quiz about different holiday traditions in the U.S. and other countries. Questions varied from where the real St. Nicholas lived



(the answer: Turkey) to what the "Urn of Fate" is for as a part of the Christmas celebration in many Italian households (the answer: it contains presents and is brought on Christmas Eve). Lucky or knowledgeable winners received small packages filled with chocolates. We planned on giving away gold coins instead of chocolates but couldn't find enough of them at the museum. Sorry!



The Vintage Fashion Show titled, *A Few of My Favorite Things*, introduced us to the dresses from the 1850s to 1970s. Beautiful outfits with sheering and laced fabrics, vibrant colors, and sophisticated designs pleased the eyes of the audience. Hats with ostrich feathers, colorful beaded bags, and stylish shoes

complemented the look. The models added some fun to the show by dancing and gesturing according to the period of their attire. There is a nostalgic feeling in all of us towards elaborate clothes even though they were much more expensive and difficult to deal with then, compared to our current choices.

After the show the poinsettias used to decorate the stage were raffled off with much success. This small break in the December rush was our thanks to members and volunteers of the Renton Historical Society and Museum for their continuous support.

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!!!  
Dorota Rahn, Volunteer Coordinator



## Collections Report

Many of you who have visited the Museum recently have noted the change in the floor plan and seating assignments. The Collections Area now occupies the area formerly assigned to the Volunteer Coordinator (Dorota Rahn). This change allowed collections materials and staff to be situated away from the more public Museum areas (main gallery, lobby), and allowed for sufficient space to set up a volunteer computer workstation and much-needed, functional artifact processing area. The additional workspace will also permit Collections staff to begin performing inspections/light conservation of collections objects to ensure they continue to be monitored regularly and stored properly for the benefit of future generations.

In early November, the Collections Management Area received permission to refit the storage facility presently housing the Society's expansive photographic collections. This transition will provide a number of benefits to both staff and researchers: easier access to the collections, improved storage consistent with collections management practice, and the opportunity to make the best use of available space within the area provided. Most importantly, the conversion to shelving units will permit consolidation of all photographic materials within the Museum facilities to the primary storage area adjacent to the administrative offices, as well as providing additional room for expansion of the collections to an estimated 19,000 images – a 35% increase in usable space. A similar evaluation and reorganization of Museum Library materials is scheduled for the first quarter of 2006.

With regard to other collections activities, repairs and through cleaning/refurbishing of existing exhibits is planned in 2006. Volunteers have continued inventorying the exhibit areas during the past several months, and this information will be reviewed against the Museum's database and donor records.

Lastly, I wish to thank both Museum staff and other Society members who welcomed me back to the Museum as a volunteer in September. Looking forward, 2006 will undoubtedly be a year of change and growth for the Museum – and the Collections Area – and I would like very much to remain a part of it. Knowing firsthand the value of volunteers who willingly contribute of their time and skills, I believe the importance of collaboration and teamwork can't be underestimated. Even what might be considered a small contribution can go a very long way.

Best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season,

Laura Crawford, Collections Manager

## New Members

Deborah Kerekes family  
John Sneddon  
Sue (Pasco) Neve  
Mark Manning  
Viola Compo  
Gary Faull  
Teresa Matthews  
Russ Demeco

(Correction of name published in  
September Quarterly)  
Life membership-Robert L. Evans

## Membership Renewals for 2006

### 2006 Membership Rates

Student/Teacher/Senior	\$12
Senior Citizen Couple	\$20
Single	\$20
Family	\$30
Patron Benefactor	\$100
Life Membership	\$500

*\*One time fee. Lifetime Memberships will be transferred to the living spouse.*

## Join the Renton Historical Society Today!

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

Membership Level: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

City:State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ + 4 ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

**Please make checks payable to the Renton Historical Society.**

VISA/MASTERCARD# \_\_\_\_\_ Ex.Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Please share your e-mail address with us: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Mail To: Membership Secretary, Renton Historical Society  
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 (\$100) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Corporate (\$100) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Life (\$500) *One Time Only* (partially tax deductible) \_\_\_\_\_
  - General Fund Donation \_\_\_\_\_
  - Endowment Fund Donation \_\_\_\_\_
- In Memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total enclosed:** \_\_\_\_\_

# Rentonians

denotes former Society Life Member



denotes former Society member

# Remembered

**Joyce Aliment**

*Ron & Sharon Clymer; John & Eleanor Bertagni*

**Virginia Shook Busato**

*Jim & Fran Bourasa*

**Mary Copeland**

*Inez Edlich*

**Betty Hall Eby**

*Evelyn Johnson*

**Maureen Trimm Fisker**

*Judy Zanga*

**George Girias**

*Gloria Duffey; Florence Delaurenti; Louise George*

**Lorraine Goodwin**

*Lillian Rosenstrom*

**Gerrie Hupp**

*John & Eleanor Bertagni*

**Bernice Koester**

*Rachel Arnone Thomas; Esther Bellinato Yellam*

**Jess Ochs, M.D.**

*Louise George; Florence Delaurenti; George & Frances Gambini*

**Richard Patterson**

*Bert & Evelyn Nord*

**Mary Zerwoodis**

**Pedersen**

*Merna Lasco*

**Mary Postishek**

*Martha Kingen*

**Alex Rivily**

*Louise George*

**Evelyn Rosenstrom**

*Lillian Rosenstrom*

**Reino Rosenstrom**

*Lillian Rosenstrom*

**Wanda Seppi**

*Louise George; Bea Mathewson*

**Laura Shook**

*Jim & Fran Bourasa*

**Grayce Thomas**

*Lillian Rosenstrom*

**Ernie J. Tonda**

*Mario Tonda; Victor Tonda; Louise George; Gloria Duffey; Florence Delaurenti; Mary V. Delaurenti; Madelene Zanatta; Mamie Thirion; Russell & Marie McPeak; Rose Camerini; Ivona Little; Renton High School Class 1940; Don & Pearl Jacobson; James Wilhoit; Loretta Hash & family; Steve & Lynn Anderson; Madeline Donckers; Ila Hemm; Mr. & Mrs. Bert Nord; Mervin G. Thomas; Robert & Gilda Youngquist; John & Eleanor Bertagni; James & Mary Lou Burdulis; Cecilia Major; Harold Bruce; Vivian Cook; Dorothy Treosti; Don & Carmel Camerini; Stanley & Norma Lou Jones; Mr. & Mrs. George Gambini; Martha Kingen; Greg & Carrie Bergquist; Beth & Mike Potoshnik; Wilma Dallosto; James Young; Corinne & Richard Lucotch; McLendon Hardware; Aileen & Conrad Chambers; Lila Houser; Rachel Thomas; Tony & Ann Porcello; Joe & Ellen Verhnik; Joyce Leas McIver; Joyce & Bob Scoll; Sandra Smith; Dorothy Caniparoli*

## Obituaries

### September 2005

David Knowle  
Arthur D. Harding Sr.  
Esther Noble  
Rose L. Gilbert  
Esther "Bonnie" L. Holt  
Michael V. Daugaard  
Joan M. Christensen  
Emsley S. Denton

### October 2005

Ernie J. Tonda  
Alex Rivily  
Alvin DeWinter  
Bertrand A. Monette  
Joyce A. Aliment  
Marjorie A. Kaufmann  
Robert J. Kaufmann  
Julia McPherson  
George Girias  
Maureen "Mimi" Fisker  
Betty F. Anderson

### November 2005

Dr. Paul W. Kravagna  
Jerry Novak  
Aldo L. Zerbato  
Leslie L. Shaeffer  
John D. Rost  
Dr. Jess B. Ochs  
Clara E. Groven  
Elsie "Nicki" Vradenburg  
Timothy H. O'Brien  
Mary Lackie Utschinski  
Wanda Seppi  
Irma E. Caldwell  
Lois Swartz  
Louise Poli Hannah

# Centennial Snapshot



*Columbine Rebekah Lodge #117 Christmas party, held at IOOF Hall at 3rd Avenue and Burnett Street, on December 16, 1925.*



**Renton History Museum  
235 Mill Avenue South  
Renton, WA 98055**

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