

Stanwood Area ECHOES

Newsletter of the Stanwood Area Historical Society
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Stanwood Area Echoes

Issue No. 68 : Fall, 2020

TELEPHONES IN STANWOOD IN THE 1890s



SAHS 92.44b.05

ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members and Friends:

During the summer of 2019, the Executive Committee worked on a strategic planning process. On August 15, 2019, Bill Keller convened an Advisory Committee to assist the executive board, incoming officers and the Finance Committee Chair in developing some goals and objectives. The Advisory Committee consisted of Steve Jones, Ryan Ovenell, Bob Cole and Ken Christoferson. The outcome was the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan.

During that same 2019 summer, many of our members worked together to create a beautiful exhibit for our 2019 Stanwood Camano Historic Sites Tour. They also created our thirty-second and probably final limited edition historic calendar. The calendar market has become quite competitive and we are looking for alternate sources of revenue.

By January 1, 2020, we had changed our organizational structure, increased our outreach, purchased QuickBooks, developed promising legislation with our Representative Dave Paul for some state funding for The Floyd and applied for numerous grants. We had two extremely successful concerts in January and February and the most successful Snow Goose & Birding Festival ever in February. We had advertised and a large committee of members were preparing for our largest fundraiser of the year, the annual Spring Tea, which was nearly sold out. We made a tremendous partnership with Sno-Isle Libraries thanks to Trustee Rob Branigan and we had scheduled five lectures through Humanities Washington, with the first one set to begin on March 8th. Our "Research Wednesdays" had become increasingly popular even requiring notices in the Crab Cracker when we were to be closed over the holidays.

We made an inspection of our rental properties on February 3, 2020, which made us aware of the deteriorated state of the property at 27202 102nd Ave. and the need for it to be vacated and torn down. The tenants at 27202 102nd Ave vacated the property in March. The building contains a good deal of asbestos adding to the physical and financial challenges of its removal. The property at 27204 had significant repair

requirements, but good bones and the property at 27206 was in reasonable condition.

COVID-19 forced us to cancel the lecture on March 8th. Weight Watchers (now called WW) cancelled their rental of the Floyd followed by many others who had booked events. We had to cancel the remaining lectures along with the Spring Tea, our ceremony honoring the fallen on Memorial Day, the 45th Old Fashioned 4th of July Parade & Ice Cream Social, the Fine Art Crafter Annual Show, the 21st Old Fashioned Christmas at The Floyd and Jazzin' with the Classics at Christmas. State funding for restoration of The Floyd, of course, disappeared due to the virus.

We did write and receive grants for COVID relief and many of our vendors helped us with utilities and services. Our business sponsors sustained us during this difficult time. And we have received many donations, especially for painting the Floyd. We have been notified of a bequest from a local individual who died of COVID-19 who named the restoration project in his will.

This downtime has allowed us to review our business practices and our mission. We have input all of our income and expenses into QuickBooks and we successfully applied for a property tax exemption for The Floyd Norgaard Cultural Center which will save us over \$8,000 annually beginning in 2021.

We have lots of ways for you to stay in touch. You can follow us on Facebook or Instagram or check out our websites for updates, history and virtual tours.

facebook.com/StanwoodAreaHistoricalSociety

facebook.com/FloydNorgaardCulturalCenter

sahs-fncc.org

thefloydnorgaard.weebly.com

<https://www.instagram.com/thefloydnorgaard/>

STANWOOD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

We were able to resume our board meetings on Zoom and decided to move forward with repair of the Floyd. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, when siding was removed from the south and east walls there was significant wood rot underneath. While we were aware of some of the decay, it was estimated that the extensive damage, if left uncorrected, posed a threat of the east wall crumbling onto 102nd Ave. in a matter of a few years. The source was the cornice, which had been breached by water years ago and this caused significant deterioration particularly to the east wall of the Floyd. All of this has ballooned the early estimates of this project.

However, we have been fortunate to hire some talented local craftsmen who have taken a unique interest in this rare 1902 public hall. D. G. Hopkins Painting and A.R.A. Construction have been working hard to repair and renovate this grand building. We are lucky to have them.

We were able to hold a Virtual and Audio Tour for the 4th Annual Stanwood Camano Historic Sites Tour. This was made possible by a tourism grant through the City of Stanwood and sponsorship of the Camano Island Chamber of Commerce. This will help us to continue achieving our mission to inform and educate our community to its history, highlighting our collections and maintaining a public presence.

I will be releasing a new book called, *Solemn, the Drums Thrill*, which expands on the essays previously presented in the Crab Cracker on the 50 local heroes we honor on our Veterans' Memorial. It will be launched on November 11th as a fundraiser for restoration and capital funds.

My term as president ends on December 31, 2020. I believe that progress has been made in advancing the mission of the organization and the stewardship of its materials and buildings. The Society is unique among such agencies because of its ownership of the history it oversees. This, however, also comes with

its responsibilities as discussed earlier in this report. It is my hope that others will see the important value such an organization as the SAHS brings to a community, especially one that is now in transition, and become active in its future. That chapter lies ahead.

Respectively submitted,

Richard A. Hanks
President, Stanwood Area Historical Society

PRESERVE THE HISTORY OF THE GREATER STANWOOD AREA



Help restore this grand old 1902 Public Hall because it holds our local history and helps us understand and respect people who lived in different times.



SNOHOMISH COUNTY'S THINKING WIRE

Thomas Stocken Adams led a colorful life although one which ended tragically. But, as operator of the area's first telegraph office in the Stillaguamish Valley he helped connect it to the greater outside world and became part of an effort that, albeit unsuccessful, was a grand experiment in the history of American communications.

His home at Port Susan (near today's Warm Beach) along the so-called Stillaguamish Telegraph Trail, built in the mid-1860s, became one stop on what was planned to be an international telegraph line linking the United States with Europe by way of Russia. The concept was developed in 1859 by entrepreneur Perry McDonough Collins following the failure of the initial trans-Atlantic cable line in 1858. After delays due to the American Civil War, the creator of the trans-Atlantic line, American businessman Cyrus West Field and the Atlantic Telegraph Company, initiated another attempt but continued to be hampered by problems and by the summer of 1865, confidence in the Atlantic project waned.

Collins had gained the support of the Russian government and Hiram Sibley, head of the Western Union Telegraph Company, to lay a telegraph line from San Francisco up the coast of the U.S., through British Columbia and Russian America (today's Alaska), under the Bering Strait and across Siberia to Moscow. There they could connect to existing lines in Europe and England. Western Union invested three million dollars in the project for the so-called Collins Overland Route.

Congress passed a bill supporting laying line up the west coast to Russia in June of 1864 and President Lincoln gave the company right of way on July 1, 1864 over unappropriated lands using the area timber and stone for construction of stations. Supporter, California Senator Milton Latham, proclaimed that "we hold the ball of the earth in our hand, and wind upon it a network of living and thinking wire till the whole is held together and bound with the same wishes, projects and interests." The telegraph became what writer Tom Standage dubbed the "Victorian internet."

The American transcontinental telegraph line reached San Francisco in 1861. California investors had already funded a line into Oregon in 1864. Service to Portland was delivered March 1, 1864 with Seattle being reached on October 25, 1864.

Local telegraph lines were built in Snohomish County by 1864 with Mulkiteo being the first office in that year for the newly designated county. Its operator Erskine Kromer reportedly came from New York in 1860 as a lineman and operator for World Telegraph. This line may have been extended south to Seattle and north through Priest Point at Tulalip to the Canadian border although details are few. Writer C. L. Andrews said the Collins Overland Route used an existing line which would have included the Port Susan office, that was constructed through the territory to the Bellingham area in 1864 terminating at New Westminster, Canada. Bellingham's Telegraph Road today is a remnant of Collins' route. Local historian Gustav Joergensen wrote in 1939 that, "'the Western Union Telegraph [sic] Line,' running north from San Francisco, was built through this [Stillaguamish] valley in 1864 a short distance west of the Meridian Survey of 1859." In a 1948 newspaper account, Joergensen provided greater detail of the Western Union line. It was built over an old Indian trail from Port Gardner, coming near lakes, Weallup, Shoecraft, Goodwin, Howard and finally Martha, emerging from the heavy timber at the claim of Thomas Adams south of Hatt Slough. "Mr. Adams went over the trail at times as lineman and putting up posts," said Joergensen, "but was not able to ride his old pony in many of those places, and it was often hard to get his pony home again."

Exact facts about Adams are sometimes contradictory or simply elusive, the confusion often caused by Adams himself. Family history posted on Ancestry.com says Adams was born in Lanarkshire, Scotland in 1835, which is corroborated by an 1894 biography although giving the year as 1840. That biography identified his Scottish parents as Dr. Joseph and Mary Patterson Adams and says Thomas Adams came to the Northwest in 1859 as part of the British Boundary Commission attempting to settle the dispute with the United States over the border with Canada and ownership of the San Juan Islands but soon left that position. He had entered military service in the British army while a young man fighting at Sebastopol in the Crimean Conflict and later South Africa and during the rebellion in India in 1857 "seeing considerable hard fighting." He received a severe wound when a copper bolt projectile struck him above his right eye, ending his military career.

His 1900 obituary said that he came to Snohomish County in 1865 which is in line with becoming the first telegraph operator at Port Susan. However, the 1894 biography states that Adams tried his hand at different jobs until 1868 when he joined the Western Union Telegraph Company staying with that company, except for a minor hiatus in 1884, until 1887 when he joined the new Postal Telegraph Company where his biography stated that he “was prominently identified with the construction of many of its pioneer lines along the Sound.” Adams was replaced as the Port Susan telegraph operator in early 1885 by Thomas Payne. Terrain and time schedules were a problem so it was not uncommon for the wires to be strung from existing trees instead of erecting poles. The line crossed the Stillaguamish River from the tops of two spruce trees, one known as the “old telegraph tree” which still stood in 1925.

By 1870 Adams was living with an Indian woman at his Port Susan home who bore him one son Joseph (and perhaps a daughter) before dying in 1892 at the age of 22 according to family history. For unknown reasons his birthplace in 1870 is given as New Hampshire and Ireland in a territorial 1883 census. Thomas married Ella Giddings in 1876 who reportedly gave him nine more children. By 1880 Adams had acquired roughly 300 acres in the area of Port Susan, much of it tidal lands along with bench land raised above the tide marsh. He reportedly began diking the tidal flats in 1877. Adams became a prominent Democrat in the area becoming a county commissioner in 1882, the same year that tragedy struck the family when their two-year-old daughter Edith Margaret fell into a well and drowned before she could be rescued.

According to his obituary, Adams suffered “a reverse of fortune” around 1895 forcing him to take up work as a hired laborer. The old Adams home at



SAHS 86.07.74

The home of Thomas Adams at Port Susan

Port Susan stood until 1989 when fire gutted the structure. On March 16, 1900 he was working on the Great Northern railroad bridge over the Stillaguamish River when he fell from a skid way to the ground and died within the hour. Words from six years earlier might comprise his epitaph: “Few men in this part of Washington are better known as Mr. Adams, and he is as popular as he is well known.”

by Richard Hanks

Sources: <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Kromer-164>; Seattle Daily Times, March 19, 1900; Illustrated History of Skagit and Snohomish Counties, 1906; Arlington Times, August 24, 1939, August 26, 1948, August 2, 1972; Ancestry.com; Daniel Walker Howe, “What Hath God Wrought,” American Heritage Magazine, v. 59, Issue 4, Winter 2010; Greg Lange, HistoryLink.org Essay 167; Harvey K. Hines, An Illustrated History of the State of Washington, 1894; C. L. Andrews, the U.S. — Siberia Telegraph, Felix Banel, ‘Victorian Internet’ hits Seattle October 1864, mynorthwest.com, October 18, 2017; Tom Standage, The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century’s On-line Pioneers, 1999; The Province (Vancouver, B.C.), October 21, 1911; Northern Star, October 7, 1976.

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SAHS Board Meetings are normally held monthly on the Third Monday at noon on the second floor of the Eldridge Research Center. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic our board meetings will be held on Zoom. If you wish to join us, leave a message at (360) 629-6110.

GET INVOLVED...STAY IN TOUCH

The Stanwood Area Historical Society is a special place. It collects and conserves the wondrous treasures of history that define our community. Your participation would not only assist in this crucial protection of our past, but would make you part of our important work. You can make a difference. Join SAHS today!

Memberships are due annually in January. This is a significant means of support for the Society and includes a subscription to the newsletter. SAHS is a tax-exempt non-profit organization and depends on gifts, bequests from individuals and groups, fundraising activities and membership dues for its financial support. Your contributions are tax deductible and will be used only for the preservation of the history of our area.

- Individual Membership: **\$20.00**
- Family Membership: **\$25.00**
- Student (Under 15) Membership: **\$5.00**

- Donation: \$ _____
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