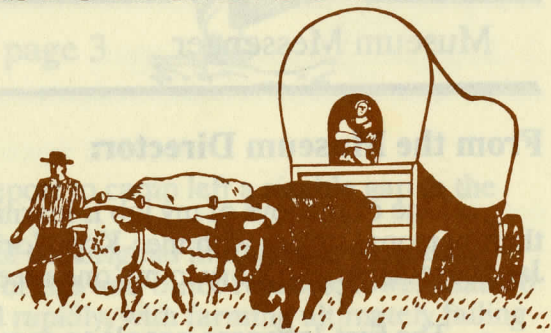


WHITE RIVER VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Museum Messenger



April, 1994

Volume 9, Number 2

Dear Historical Society Members:

Over the past few months Board member Brian Crain has been working with other members, Mae Yamada, Tom Hikida and Mel Sinex to assess the Museum's environmental system, specifically how the building is heated and cooled. In their evaluation, it was found that the current system is not adequate for either the collection's preservation or human comfort. Thus, this Long Range Planning Committee has recommended to the Board that an overhaul of the system has to be seriously considered. Although as anyone who has ever remodeled their own house knows, such construction is quite disruptive. Prior to the construction, the entire facility will have to be emptied in order to preserve the collection from dust and dirt. This presents many other options and opportunities for this institution. While our standing exhibits have served our public well, the question arises of how to best re-install the exhibits to tell the exciting, unique story of the Valley.

Recently, the Board spent an entire Saturday morning in a session facilitated by Rev. Bob Ward to identify themes important to the heritage of this area. The Board agreed that it is important to show the history of the railroad, rivers, farming, Japanese Americans, Native Americans, and many of the industries that played an important part in White River history. More significantly, the Board has decided to ask the community-at-large and members what you think is important. Over the next few months, the Society will be hosting focus groups for this purpose. I personally, along with the Board members, look forward to hearing from you through this process. The results of these focus groups will set a path for this institution for the next several years and build a better Museum.

Warmly, Linda Cowan, Society President

Memberships are due April 30!

Please send in your check with the enclosed form.



From the Museum Director:

One of the joys of my job is learning from individuals who generously share their personal stories with me. Koji Norikane recounted his understanding of the Japanese American story to me one recent afternoon. Here is what he said.

The first Japanese people to come to the White River Valley arrived in 1898, with the bulk of the individuals immigrating in the first decade of 1900. Most of the early immigrants were younger sons, for whom financial opportunities were scarce in their homeland. So, the intention of most Japanese immigrant men was to move to America to make enough money to improve their station in life, then return to Japan.

These men came to America with skills as farmers and laborers, so they often found their first employment in those fields. Japanese men were first hired as laborers to clear the land for farming and work on the railroad.

Japanese immigrant farmers raised potatoes first, recounted Koji. They moved to dairy farming, servicing the Borden and Carnation Condenseries. At one time there were about 50 Japanese immigrant families running dairies. Selling milk for canning was profitable, especially during World War I. However, prices plummeted after the war and the federal government began testing the herds for disease. These factors caused many dairymen to turn to farming in the early 1920's.

Koji chuckles with disbelief as he notes that life was difficult in the 1920's and 1930's. "They sold three dozen heads of lettuce for 39 cents! It was hard on the farmers." Traditional Japanese farming was characterized by an intensive use of small plots of land. In America, this kind of family farm has been known as a truck garden. Cabbage, cucumbers, cauliflower, and beans from these gardens were purchased by Libbys. Koji estimates that ninety percent of Libby's cabbage (used for kraut) was purchased from White River farmers. In the 1920's and 30's, Kent was the agricultural center of the Valley. Many firms that packed and shipped lettuce, pies and cauliflower to eastern markets operated there. Kent canneries included Picksweet, Stokeldy and Libby. Throughout the 1920's and 30's, the valley was a verdant patchwork of truck gardens.

Farming remained the major enterprise for Japanese American families right up until the evacuation and internment in 1942. A quick scan through any of our school annuals from pre-1942 will show that often over one-third of the student body

continued, next page

White River Valley Historical Museum

Open: Thursday through Sunday, 1:30 to 4:30, and by appointment for group tours and research.
918 H Street SE, Auburn WA 98002 (206) 939-2783

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The White River Valley Historical Society is, in large part, supported by the City of Auburn.
Thank You!



continued...

was of Japanese descent. Their leaving to report to camp left a sizable gap in the valley's economy and life.

Koji recalls that after the war, many of the original immigrants were too elderly to return and begin farming again. For this and other reasons, fewer than 30 families returned. Life in the valley changed rapidly, with farming ultimately failing due to the pressures of industry. Koji notes that there were several reasons for the decline of farming:

1) The produce supply and distribution system changed. Before World War II there were many "Mom and Pop" independent grocery stores supplied by local farmers, peddlers and commission houses in Seattle. Today, we have huge supermarket chain stores that need a constant supply of vegetables which the local armers cannot produce. So the big chain stores purchase from California or anywhere that can provide a year-round steady supply.

2) Land value increased dramatically. After the Hanson dam was built, land values increased, as did taxes. Farmers could not compete with corporate America for the purchase of good, flat land.

3) Farmers' and dairymen's children did not want to be farmers. They saw that the life of a farmer permitted few vacations or luxuries and sought to improve their status with college educations.

4) It became less economically feasible to farm on a small, intensive scale.

Koji recalls with pride many qualities of the community in which he was raised. "For the early Japanese farmers, friends were more important than relatives, because they didn't have any family here. So they helped each other to survive. Those old timers, they were very brave." "No Japanese people went on welfare during the hard times, they were a proud people who worked together and shared what they had." Koji reflects upon Chiyokichi Natsuhara, who during the depression, furnish farming supplies for many of the Japanese American farmers in the valley--with funds borrowed from the bank. During successful years those who could, would pay him back. "I am just not that brave," says Koji. [I might disagree, since Koji and Mary Norikani returned to their home valley after internment. After restarting their life, they raised a family and put their children through college, working side by side as farmers.] Despite the hardship of internment, Koji says there is no place as wonderful and full of opportunity as America.

Koji Norikane and Patricia Cosgrove

Memories of the Japanese American White River Community

The theme of this issue is memories of the Japanese American community as offered by members and friends of the Historical Society. Enjoy!



The following excerpts are from Farmlands, The Story of Thomas a Small Agricultural Community in King County, Washington, by Stan Flewelling.

White River Buddhist Temple

Many Japanese pioneers were Buddhists. As the Northwest Buddhist community grew, missionary priests came to Seattle and developed teaching circuits into several outlying communities, including the White River Valley. Rev. Gendo Nakai was the first Buddhist clergyman to meet with valley-area believers. They met in homes.

Rev. Kozen Morita founded the Shirakawa Bukkyokai ("White River Buddhist Church") in October, 1912. It was the second Buddhist congregation established in King County. Formerly the associate minister of the Seattle Church, Rev. Morita became the first resident clergy in the valley. The new group rented the school building in Thomas where they held services every Sunday evening.

Rev. Morita returned to Japan in 1913 and his position in the Thomas church was soon filled by Rev. Eiju Shibata. During Rev. Shibata's seven and a half years of leadership, White River Buddhist Church grew to over 300 members and purchased six acres of land in Christopher on Meredith Road (37th St. N.W.), just west of the Northern Pacific Railroad tracks. They bought the first Pialschie [name for Thomas] School building and moved it from Thomas to the Christopher site. The temple was dedicated on March 10, 1918.

By then, the church had become a veritable community and cultural center for Japanese residents in the valley. A Japanese Language School for children was opened. Groups for women and youth, and a Sunday School, were started.

The growth continued in the 1920's and 30's. The church constructed several additions to the "Thomas building," including a new hall. Members of the church were active in regional Buddhist associations.

World War II and the subsequent internment of Japanese American residents left the temple building empty for years. Members took their faith to the camps, where it persevered. As a few families gradually returned to the valley, church organizations and activities were revived with the help of ministers from Seattle and Tacoma. It was 1969 before White River Buddhist Church again welcomed a resident minister.

In 1963, the flourishing congregation sold its property, bought a new site at 3625 Auburn Way North (once Christopher, now part of Auburn), and launched a major building program. The new church was dedicated on September 13, 1964 and remains the center of Buddhist activity in the valley today. The name was changed from "Church" to "Temple" around 1978.

Stan Flewelling



Japanese Language School

Japanese immigrants were proud of their cultural heritage. They wanted their American-born children to learn the language of their forebears, to know their roots. So in an area where Japanese families lived, it was common for parents to organize a Japanese Language School.

In Thomas [a small farming town once between Auburn and Kent], the founding of the Japanese Language School was closely tied to the beginning of the White River Buddhist Temple. Just as the temple was the second Buddhist congregation organized in King County, the language school was the county's second (preceded only by Seattle) when it began classes in 1913. A Mr. Nakayama was said to be the first teacher. He had something over ten pupils.

When White River Buddhist Church moved the original two-room Thomas School building south to Christopher in 1918, the Japanese Language School followed. One side housed the temple, the other side, the school.

Most of the Nisei (2nd generation) children attended the Japanese Language School. As Thomas Grade School was dismissed each day and other kids were getting involved in chores or play, Japanese kids walked a mile south and began a second school session. They studied until 5:30 and walked home. For most, it was a daily circuit of up to five miles on foot. Mae Yamada remembers packing two lunches and staying at school until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. when there were practices for festival programs in holiday seasons.

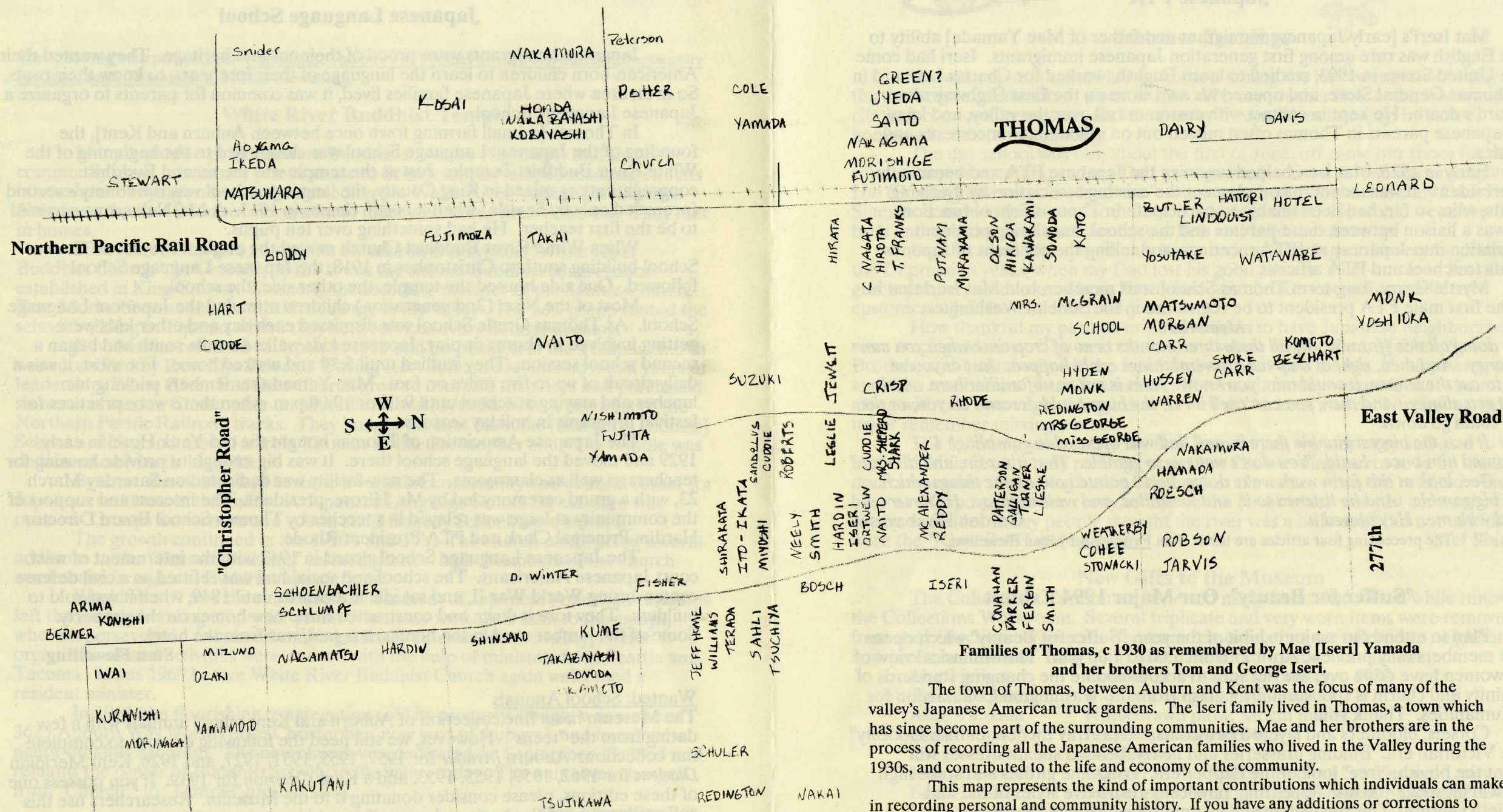
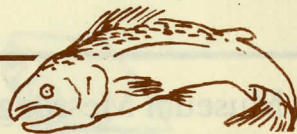
The Japanese Association of Thomas bought the old Yank Hotel in early 1929 and moved the language school there. It was big enough to provide housing for teachers as well as classrooms. The new facility was dedicated on Saturday March 23, with a grand ceremony led by Mr. Hirose, president. The interest and support of the community at large was relayed in speeches by Thomas School Board Director Hardin, Principal Clark and PTA President Rhode.

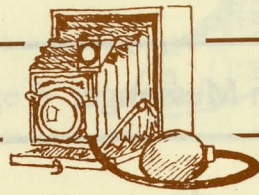
The Japanese Language School closed in 1942 with the internment of west coast Japanese Americans. The school and social hall was refitted as a civil defense center during World War II, and sat idle afterwards until 1949, when it was sold to builders. They tore it down and constructed three new homes on the property. Some of the lumber used in the homes, it is said, was from the hotel.

Stan Flewelling

Wanted: School Annuals

The Museum has a fine collection of Auburn and Kent school annuals with a few dating from the "teens". However, we still need the following editions to complete our collection: Auburn *Invader* for 1957, 1955, 1951, 1927, and 1926, Kent *Meridian Diadem* for 1962, 1959, 1955, 1953, and a Kent *Criterion* for 1939. If you possess one of these editions, please consider donating it to the Museum. Researchers use this collection on a regular basis and your gift would be preserved for future generations.





Japanese PTA

Mat Iseri's [early Japanese immigrant and father of Mae Yamada] ability to speak English was rare among first generation Japanese immigrants. Iseri had come to the United States in 1903, studied to learn English, worked for Charles Leonard in the Thomas General Store, and opened his own store on the East Highway after Leonard's death. He kept in contact with customers all over the valley, and knew that Japanese parents in Thomas often missed out on school announcements and activities.

Early in 1928, Mat Iseri helped organize the Japanese PTA and became its first president. It was meant to complement the existing association by involving parents, who, so far, had been unable to participate in Thomas School functions. Iseri was a liaison between these parents and the school, translating pertinent information into Japanese at JPTA meetings, and taking the concerns of Japanese parents to school and PTA officials.

Myrtle Curry, long-term Thomas School staff member, told Mat Iseri that he was the first male PTA president to be registered in the State of Washington.

Memories...

We're doing all this [farm work] till these three months or so of crop time when you can get money. And then, right at crop time, several things could happen. Just as you're ready to cut the lettuce, it could rain, you know. Rain is not so unfamiliar here. And then it gets slimy. And then, you can't sell it. Or the bugs could descend on you, or the prices could go down.

It was the biggest gamble there is, and dad was opposed to gambling! I confronted him once. I said, "You don't want us to gamble. That it's a sin, and all that." I said, Gee, look at this farm work we're doing, and I pointed out all the things which was a big gamble. And he listened to it, and he smiled, and walked away. He never argued with me. He enjoyed it.

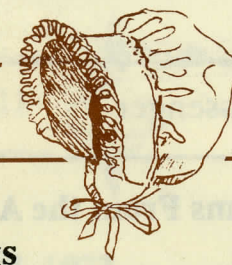
Gordon Hirabayashi

The preceding four articles are taken from Farmlands by Stan Flewelling.

"Suffer for Beauty" Our Major 1994 Exhibit

Plan to attend our major exhibit of the year, "Suffer for Beauty" which opens with a members only preview, April 27 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. This whimsical view of what women have done over the decades to accommodate the changing standards of femininity and charm is sponsored by a grant from the Washington Commission for the Humanities. Thank you!

Corsets, bloomers and layered petticoats will portray the "coquettish modesty" of the Victorian era. Binding brasseries and heavy, beaded sheath dresses will present the boyish, "free" look of the flapper era. Long-line girdles and spike high heels will illustrate the lush appearing, physically-restrictive styles of the mid-twentieth century. This fun exhibit will be on display through December 18.



Summer Earnings

Growing up as a school kid in Auburn during the late twenties and early thirties was, as I remember, a perfect life. We, my brother Bob and I, had trees to climb, fence rows to explore, and the nearby Green River to enjoy: by canoe, homemade rafts, or swimming.

The day school was out, about the first of June, off came our shoes for the whole summer vacation, and my Dad gave each of us boys, as well as our neighbor Hal (Sonney) Chesney, "a pig-shave." Oh, it wasn't all play, because my Dad, Ford Sinex, was an avid gardener, both flowers and vegetables. He would weed the flower beds and trim the trees and shrubs, but Bob and I did the clean-up.

But this ideal life-style of ours had a rude awakening at the very beginning of the Depression years, when my Dad lost his good job as a meat-cutter in Seattle. The grocery store and market where he worked went broke--extending credit to customers who also had lost their jobs.

How thankful my parents must have been to have Japanese neighbors who were truck gardeners. The next summer my whole family, Dad, Mother, Sister, Brother, and I, climbed over the fence and went to work for Mr. Yuki, picking peas and then raspberries. I can't remember how much money we made that summer but along with our own vegetable garden, as well as chickens and rabbits that we raised, I never remember missing a meal.

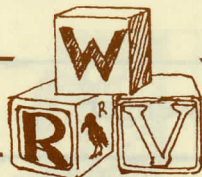
The following years, after my Dad found a job, we kids were still glad to work in the Yuki fields, not only picking berries but also weeding carrot rows by the acre. I don't remember it as being hard work, but just the same, when the railroad whistle blew at 4:00 p.m., we were ready to take to the River which was just across the field on the east side. Many people thought the river was a little cold, but not us kids--we were the "River Rats" and loved it!

Mel Sinex

New Gifts to the Museum

The Collections Committee reviewed many items discovered while renovating the Collections Workroom. Several triplicate and very worn items were removed from the collection. Whenever items are removed, they are offered to neighboring non-profit institutions. New items accepted into the collection include:

Mar Hebert	Conductor's change dispenser, c 1930
Tom Chapman	Two pair eyeglasses and case
Alan Yamada	Horsedrawn plow, Mochi mallet
Glen Petersen	Handmade baseball bat
Greg Watson	Ox shoe
Jack Grinnell	Charter of the Auburn Federal Savings and Loan
Ervin Jensen	Snapshop collection of 1960's Auburn Good Ol' Days
Dean Maulsby	Assortment of reference books



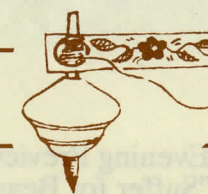
News Items From the Auburn Globe Republican, July - Sept., 1934

1. Auburn's liquor store opens under management of C.E. West. Business was brisk (edit. To the chagrin of local moonshiners!)
2. Old Vienna Bakery Building is razed. It formerly served as Auburn's first school building, 1886.
3. Technocracy unit planned for Auburn. (Edit. Technocracy was a political philosophy that faded, as so many others have during our history.)
4. Farmers Valley Co-Op to be established here. A money saver for farmers of the area.
5. Auburn Day program packed full: concerts by Auburn band, foot races, picnic in the park, kids parade, baseball, parade of nations, dance, midnight movie and much, much more.
6. Chester Clifton, an Auburn boy, gives interesting talk on West Point. (Edit. General Clifton became military aid to President Kennedy.)
7. Showing at the Grenada Theater, George White's Scandals: "Viva Villa" with Wallace Beery, "Circus Clown" with Joe E. Brown.
8. Hugh Leslie, whose father owns and publishes this newspaper, is working on the Tacoma Ledger this week, filling in for vacationers flitting from desk to desk. (Edit. His brother Alvin is today an active member of the Museum Board.)
9. The 12th Annual Ellensburg Rodeo is getting ready for the Labor Day weekend. Thousands of devout fans are expected.
10. Churches in Auburn number a total of nine: Seventh Day Adventist, Catholic, Christian Scientist, Messiah Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Zion Lutheran, Episcopal, and Buddhist.
11. Two undertakers, James F. Lamar and Scotts Funeral Home with lady assistant. (Edit. Did a lady assistant make the process more genteel?)
12. Dust bowl farmers head for the Northwest. Not all want to go to California.
13. Eliza Scott dies. 92 years of age. A 78 year member of the Methodist Church. Her husband, a Civil War veteran, drowned in Dawson Creek, Yukon Territory (Canada) in 1903 while panning for gold.

Joe Koch

Dressed To Kill

On Saturday, April 30, join the Historical Society for the spring lecture, by Lois Bark, Costume Curator Emeritus of the Museum of History and Industry. Ms. Bark, a regional expert on fashion history, will present a slide show on the subject of Suffer for Beauty called "Dressed to Kill." Her lecture will review the restrictions of Victorian styles and the reform movement which followed. Ms. Bark is an entertaining speaker, and will bring a small collection of artifacts to discuss and show. Roberson Room, Auburn Library, 2:00 to 3:30, no admission fee.



Kent Advertiser Journal, 1923

Jan. 4, 1923 Dunn's Meat Market, State Bank Building
Soup Bones 3 lbs. .25, Back Bones .05, Hamburger (lb) .15. Sausage (lb) .20. Try our little pigs, we render our own lard.

Kent Matlock Farm: Sukie (a cow) driven 5 miles from her home to a new pasture, found her way back home, though blind-folded. Cows do not have much sense but she achieved a performance that raises a problem beyond the understanding of the wisest of men! (Newsworthy?)

Kent Births and Deaths for 1922: 88 births and 72 deaths Births - 49 boys, 39 girls. The 72 death group as follows: 4 suicide, 4 accidental, 6 cancer, 8 tuberculosis, 3 pneumonia, 19 heart disease, 3 kidney disease, ill infants under 2 years and the balance from miscellaneous causes. G.M. Mac Gregor Health Officer.

Jan. 18, 1922, G. O. Hallock, authorized Ford agent - phone 1, Kent, Washington. Ford sedan, new price, F.O.B. Detroit, \$4595.00. Prompt delivery.

Feb. 1, 1922, Kent Tire Shop - Michelin Tires, 30 x 3 1/2 cord tires, \$12.75. One of the very best money can buy. We are behind every tire! (Edit. Sounds a bit crowded to me!)

Kent High School returned with a victory last Friday night. The basketball team came home victorious after a battle with Enumclaw. The score was 21 to 20. The girls also played but were defeated by a score of 20 to 9.

"MEN WANTED" The Northern Pacific Railway will employ men at rates prescribed by the U.S. Labor Board. Machinists, .70 per hour; Blacksmiths, .70 per hour; Electricians, .70 per hour; Boilermakers, .70 per hour; Passenger Carmen, .70 per hour; Freight Carmen, .63 per hour; Helpers, all classes, .47 per hour; Engineers and Firemen, various rates. J. J. McCullough, Supt., Seattle.

Kent Theatre, Feb. 2-3 Wallace Reid in the world's "champeen" comedy "Henpecked". Feb. 4-5, George Melford with Milton Sills & Wanda Hawley in "Burning Sands" (The answer to "The Shiek".) Feb. 7 Irene Castle in "French Heels". Feb. 11 & 12, Harold Lloyd in "Dr. Jack"

March 20, Bob Robinson, practical horseshoing, 2nd & Harrison, Kent, Washington. All work guaranteed. Phone 121-J

Doris Ramstead

Memberships are due April 30!

Please send in your check with the enclosed form.

Calendar

- April 27 Evening Preview, "Suffer for Beauty," 5:00 to 7:00 pm, Museum
April 28 "Suffer for Beauty," major exhibit of the year opens
April 30 Slide/Lecture and Quarterly Meeting, Lois Bark, Costume Curator Emeritus, speaks on "Suffer for Beauty", 2:00 -3:30, Roberson Room, Auburn Library
- April 30 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIPS DUE**
May 4 Board Meeting, 1:30 to 2:30, all welcome, Museum
June 1 Board Meeting, 1:30 to 2:30, all welcome, Museum
June 24 Auburn KidsDay, Museum open extended hours, 10:00 to 4:30
July 4 Holiday Celebration, Museum open extended hours, 10:00 to 4:30
July 6 Board Meeting, 1:30 to 2:30, all welcome, Museum

As a surprise gesture, celebrating Al Leslie's lifetime of newspaper work, community support, and invaluable service to the Historical Society, the newspaper research room was officially named the Leslie Newspaper Library. Thank you Al!

White River Valley Historical Society
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