



# Benn's Bulletin

A Publication of *The Friends of the Aberdeen Museum*

September 2008

## Dan Williams

### 2008

# “Harborite of the Year”

*Tommi Halvosem Gatlin & Dann Sears*

## Coming Events

Aberdeen Museum Board  
Monthly Meeting  
First Tuesday of each month  
Aberdeen Museum  
7:00 p.m.

Friends of the Aberdeen Museum  
Monthly Meeting  
Third Tuesday of each month  
Aberdeen Museum  
7:00 p.m.

## Mark Your Calendars

**Pieceful Discoverer's  
2008  
Quilt Show**

**Aberdeen Museum  
Saturday and Sunday  
September 13th & 14th**

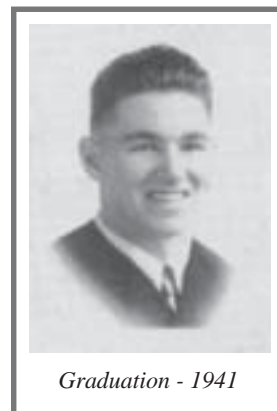
**Admission:  
\$3.00  
at the door**

**Join The Friends of the  
Museum, members and staff  
at the museum's 6th Annual  
Dinner honoring Dan for his  
outstanding contributions to  
the Grays Harbor community.**

**The Dinner will be held in the  
Aberdeen Museum, located  
at 111 East Third Street,  
Saturday, October 11, 2008.  
For information, call  
(360) 533-1976**



Though Dan was born in Bay City, Oregon, his family roots are embedded in both Grays Harbor soil and the old-time timber industry. His Grandfather George Williams was a well known Northwest timber cruiser, and his great-grandfather, Dan Pike, staked a homestead claim in John's River in 1866.



*Graduation - 1941*

Wishkah Valley where Dan began his schooling, eventually graduating from Weatherwax High School in 1941. Shortly after he finished school he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served in the Pacific as a gunner in a Douglas Dauntless, SBD..

After Dan's father was injured in a logging accident, the family migrated to Grays Harbor in 1929, settling in the upper

After being discharged in 1946 Dan attended Washington State College and earned a degree in forestry.

*Dan Williams Continued on page 3*



## Aberdeen Museum of History

Dann Sears, *Director*

### Board Members

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 Skooter Scherieble  
 Carol Stubb

## Museum Update

by Dann Sears, *Director*

Thanks to a grant from the Kelsey Foundation of Montesano the Aberdeen Museum of History held the official kick-off of its "Women of Grays Harbor" program. Attendance soared to over ninety, as Aberdeen graduate, Dr. Roland DeLorme (ret.) of Western Washington University, presented a brief but stirring introduction to the event.

Guests were then treated to a wonderful series of living history vignettes ranging from the experiences of a youthful School Marm, to a "Silent Madam" perched on a balcony above a storefront.

The performers who brought our historical women to life included: Carol Stubb (Jessie Young Irvine), Lena Duggan (School Marm), Skooter Scherieble (Shopkeeper), Debbie Elmore (Theater Usher), Linda Pickering (Silent Madame), Lynette Romero (Gladys Phillips), Julie Skokan (Suffragette No.1) and Brenda Richardson (Suffragette No.2). Although most of the scripts were taken from actual interviews, we would like to thank Doris Backholm who wrote the script for Gladys Phillips, and Debbie Elmore for the wonderful "Women's Suffrage in Washington: A Conversation."

Guest speaker for the evening was Stephanie Coontz, nationally recognized author and Professor of History and Family Studies at The Evergreen State College, who gave an interesting presentation on Women's Rights in Washington from the pioneer era until the enactment of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920.

During intermissions guests were invited to roam through the museum

and indulge in refreshments prepared by museum volunteers while being entertained by two outstanding local musicians: Sue Shaffer on the harp, and flautist Geri Stubb.

The Aberdeen Museum plans on conducting more "Women of Grays Harbor" events in conjunction with the 2010 Centennial Celebration of the Women's Suffrage amendment to the Washington State Constitution in the future. So if you missed our first event, you will have ample opportunities to enjoy one of our next events.

A few words concerning other projects in the museum. Progress has been rolling along in the photo-lab. Steve Smith and John Christiansen have been extremely busy. Steve has scanned and catalogued 4,020 images and over 950 glass plates, documenting life styles and industry during the early days of Aberdeen and Grays Harbor. While on the other end of the lab, John has been transferring what seems like miles of motion picture film covering everything from early Aberdeen-Hoquiam football games to Teddy Roosevelt receiving the Nobel Prize, the George Wolff collection and even footage from WWI. These will all be duplicated onto high-quality DVDs and when finished, be available to the public and educational communities. Great job!!

Bob Scherieble (an excellent woodcarver) is back in his element, do conservation work on Circus Jimmy's totem pole, which stood against the maintenance building in Sam Benn Park for many years. No pun intended, but Bob has his work cut-out for him.

Volunteer Ron Rivera has also been hard at work on a multi-phase project

*Continued next column*

to enhance the museum's ship-building exhibit. First, the old Methodist Church windows had to be removed from the west wall of the Pioneer Church exhibit, new openings cut on the inside, and the windows replaced. Next Ron fabricated exhibit cases and installed them into the old openings, along with recessed lighting, sanded, painted, prepared trim work and Plexiglas™ to seal the cases once the artifacts are in place. These cases will make nice additions to our shipbuilding exhibit and the *John Cudahy* wheelhouse.

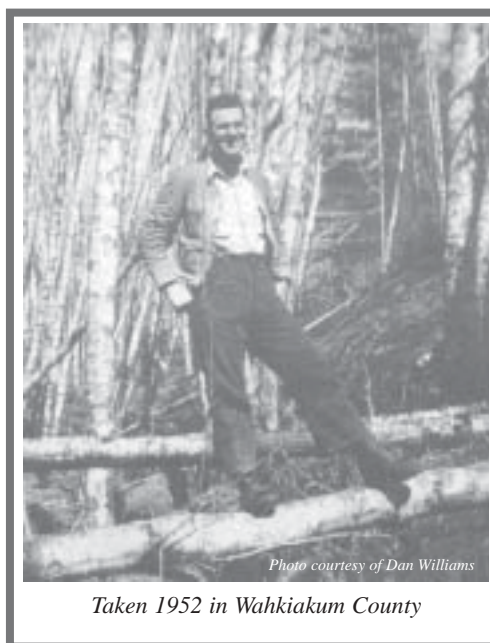
Future projects will be the completion of the museum's logging display which will include a bunkhouse display and large display unit for tools of the trade. Byron Eager has become an excellent docent, sharing his knowledge of logging and forestry while steadily up-grading and running our logging show for the guests.

I would also like to mention our lady volunteers who run the behind-the-scenes operations. If I leave anyone out it is without malice.

Emily Airhart, the ramrod of "The Women of Grays Harbor," scurries about cataloguing with the help of Nancy Miller and her daughter; Bette Garbe for organizing newspaper stories and the museum scrapbook. Credit goes to Carol Stubb for pulling our reference library together. Sharon Eager, who fills in where ever she is needed, and last but not least Skooter Scherieble, who does everything from cleaning and sewing fabrics to exhibits; trim-


ming bushes to sweeping streets. All our ladies are fantastic. Thanks to one and all. I would like to acknowledge both Museum Boards for their outstanding work, and the Aberdeen City Council and City Departments for their continuous support. Most of all, thanks to all our contributing membership, and the guests of the Aberdeen Museum.

***This is your Museum, and your History.*** ■



*Photo courtesy of Dan Williams*

*Taken 1952 in Wahkiakum County*

  
***In  
Loving Memory***  
***David K. Pavletich  
Nan Shimmin Smith  
Marzella Jones***

**Dan Williams**—cont. from page 1

He also became a licensed professional land surveyor.

In 1950, Dan went to work for Rayonier, quickly becoming head timber cruiser, a job he loved, he says, because of "the peace and quiet."

Five years later Dan went to work as head of timber operations for the Blagen Timber Company. In 1961 he returned to Rayonier as manager of log sales.

Five years later, Dan purchased the Elmore Boom Company of Aberdeen, which he operated until semi-retirement in 1975—returning to cruising and surveying.

In 1958 the City of Hoquiam needed assistance in managing its city watershed. After a failed attempt in contacting the

University of Washington School of Forestry, the city went to local officials. Dan was contacted and proceeded to develop a plan which was adopted in 1959. He surveyed, developed preliminary road systems, as well as a tree-planting program.

"He was the pioneer city forester," said Dick Sterling, who later held the job. Moreover, "the pattern of everything we did was based in Dan's early work."

## The *Women* of Grays Harbor

### Mrs. Balch, Harbor Survivor of Covered Wagon Days Tells of Experiences:

Mrs. Cathern Balch interrupted herself in the midst of pioneer day recollections, to jump ahead a few generations. Mrs. Balch remembers the covered wagon, the long trek westward from the Mississippi river, Indian and Mormon raiders of the wagon trains, and many other things of which the present generation gets faint conception from books and movies. It was a bit unexpected when she halted in the very high tide of reminiscence to ponder briefly over the new woman.

“Women nowadays seem to have trouble raising their children,” she mused, turning to glance through the window at the rain beaten slopes of the old Balch homestead and at the anachronistic Balch railway station beyond, as seen from the comfort of the farm house living room. “It’s no easy job, at best, bringing up young ones as they ought to be brought up. Pour souls—I mean the mothers of today—they have a hard job, for they are doing so many other things at the same time. Now for myself, as a young woman I didn’t have much to do...”

“Well as I was saying, there we all stood on the Chehalis River bank, out there with the high water; spread all over the flats like it used to get in those days before the stream was opened up.” Mr. Balch, myself and the children. Mr. Balch had to get us across. He’d got the wagon over, by taking it to pieces and loading it atop two canoes lashed together, and the horses had to be made to swim over.

There was still flood water all around us, before we could get to the log cabin.”

“The man he’d bought squatter rights from—though as it turned out, had nothing to sell us really, for the land he had squatted on had not been opened up for homesteading and that meant trouble afterward, getting our rights straightened out—well, this man induced us to get on a sled, myself and the children, to be hauled through the flood water. That’s the way we arrived at the cabin soaked. Our host however had a fire ready laid in the fire place. We soon had a roaring blaze and were getting dried out when the chimney—it was built of stones wattled together with straw and mud—caught fire. Our oldest girl had to climb to the roof, and we passed up buckets of water to put it out.

#### *Seed Potatoes for Food*

It was late in November of 1882 when Mrs. Balch and her brood emerged from their watery plunge to settle in what was to be their permanent home in the Chehalis River Valley.

There were a few other slight inconveniences, to be sure. Mr. Balch had brought them from Olympia, a hard journey over a country with no roads, and he was restricted as to the amount of load he might carry in the way of provisions. He intended to make an immediate trip back to Olympia for

extra provisions and other necessities. The rains however had set in as it proved for an unexampled downpour, and the countryside was flooded for weeks. Philosophically they ate up the seed potatoes which were to have gone into the ground. “Nevertheless we were well settled in by the following spring,” said Mrs. Balch.

At that time there were the Lemmonds, Gurrands, Brewers, and Rowes as our only neighbors. There were enough of us though to require a school teacher, and we got one right away; boarding her around, which was the custom. There was always a school teacher for the early settlements. “I remember the first one, as young as I was, down at the mouth of the Cowlitz. He was my half brother.”

#### *Crossing the Plains*

“In ’51, when father and mother and all of us left Missouri for the overland trip, I was four years old. I remember much of the journey. Much more of my memories, of course, are what my mother told me afterwards. There was one thing we children had constantly impressed on us by mother; that everything depended on father.”

Mrs. Balch was the daughter of Stephen D. Ruddell, a Kentuckian, who settled for a brief period in Missouri before taking the covered wagon road westward. A man of infinite resource, courage and determination, that is evident from his daughter’s memories. The Ruddell families of Olympia and Elma today are younger generations

of his two sons, Stephen and William, both deceased.

“Father was all important, we were made to realize,” pursued Mrs. Balch. “You can easily see that this must have been so. It was his forethought and unceasing watchfulness that brought us through; without him we were lost for certain, and how watchful he was”!

“He brought the first real American horses into this country. Before that, there was nothing but Mexican ponies. He had a blooded horse among his stock—a lucky thing it was one morning, when we learned that Indians, or just as likely Mormons painted up for the part, as father said, stampeded all our cattle in the night, ours and a lot of others in the train. Father jumped onto this blooded horse, without saddling it, and rode off after his stock. He had trained his cattle to heed his voice—and he stopped them first, and then as they settled down stopped many others and brought most of them back to the train. That was just one of several times our cattle were run off. We lost some, but we got through.

### *Pioneer Fatalities*

Fighting? Oh yes, there was that. We had our share of bloodshed, though only one man died outright. There were others however, who succumbed later to their wounds. I can remember too; camps we came upon where bodies lay stripped of everything, but we made it through.”

“At The Dalles on the Columbia River the Ruddells and others in the train stopped. There they made scows

with enormous labor, loading wagons, stock and families aboard; floated down the mighty stream to the mouth of the Cowlitz River. Throwing up a log cabin Mr. Ruddell left his family there and pressed on to Puget Sound.” It was down at the mouth of the Cowlitz that Mrs. Balch’s brother, Urbin S. Hicks, for a space taught the pioneer school.

Mr. Ruddell brought his family the following year to Chamber’s Prairie, just outside of Olympia, where they settled permanently. There Cathern Ruddell was wooed and won by a young lumberman from the Maine woods, Augustine Balch, and there spent the first years of their married life.

“It is the homestead here on the Chehalis River however, that I always think of as home,” said Mrs. Balch. “I love the country here, though the river has not always been my friend.”

### *A Pioneer Tragedy*

It is not the first home-coming in the flood of which Mrs. Balch is thinking when she says, the river has not always been her friend. There are more tragic memories of which she speaks with a stern, controlled grief. There is no abatement, in recurring to them, a vigor of her personality, a strong sparkling one when her reminiscences are pleasant, and no less vital and impressive when they are tinged by tragedy. For there has been stark tragedy, the details of which are as vivid to her as ever.

In 1894 Mrs. Balch and her family passed some months in Oakville, because of high waters that had

flooded the vicinity of the farm home. When they determined to return to the farm it happened that the ferry, Mr. Balch operated regularly for the county, had been torn from its mooring. This, as Mrs. Balch says, “because no heed had been given to his repeated request for fresh tow rope to replace one that had become badly frayed and weakened.”

When the family assembled on the river bank for the crossing by canoe used in lieu of the lost ferry, a neighbor, Mr. Rowe, desired to cross with them. To this Mr. Balch, after urging that he wait until the women and children had crossed, gave consent reluctantly, for he knew that the old man was extremely nervous. His fears proved to be well based, for Mr. Rowe, as the canoe was caught by a swirling eddy, scrambled to his feet and clutched frenziedly at Mr. Balch’s shoulders. The frail craft was upset and all the occupants thrown into the boiling stream.

Mr. Balch and little George Balch drowned, their bodies not being recovered until six months later. Years after, another son Charles, who played his part manfully in the canoe tragedy and in the rescue of those saved, drowned in Garrand creek. The waters have not been kind to Mrs. Balch. ■

*This article appeared in  
The Aberdeen Daily World  
December, 1925  
Written by  
W.S. Morris  
As told by Mrs. Balch*

Dan Williams continued from page 2

Dan also served as director and president for both the Grays Harbor and Puget Sound Logging and grading bureaus, director and chairman of the Olympic Logging Conference in 1978 and director of the Pacific Logging Congress for four years.

Among his other accomplishments Dan has become an excellent historian, and has written several essays: *A Hunters Reminiscences*, 1998; *The West Branch of The Wishkah*, 2001; *The Lake Ozette Country*, 2003; *The Quinault Country 1948-1950*, 2004. All these and other stories are located in the museum's reference collection. ■



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