



The Orcas Islander

Newsletter of the Orcas Island Historical Society - Spring 2010

"We educate, inspire, connect and involve our community and visitors as stewards of island history."

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- ◆ Women's History Month
- ◆ New Quilt for 2010 Raffle
- ◆ Journey Stories Updates

Coming Soon

July 3: 60th Annual
Historical Day Fair

July 17: Journey Stories
Exhibit arrives at
OIHM

CURRENT HOURS

We are currently open
on Saturdays from
10 am to 3 pm
or by appointment.

March is Women's History Month

"XWELAS" by Tom Welch

George Phillips was a Welsh immigrant who worked as a cooper making casks and barrels at the Langdon Lime Works on Orcas Island in Washington Territory. While walking along a forest trail near the Lime Works with his teenage stepson, Mason Fitzhugh, on Christmas Day in 1878, Phillips was suddenly hit by a load of buckshot fired by an assailant hidden in the brush along the trail. Sinking to the ground, mortally wounded, Phillips expired as the assailant stepped onto the trail from behind the brush. Standing there, with a baby strapped to her back and a shotgun in her hand, his pregnant wife stood watching as her son stared at her from his dead stepfather's side.

Mason Fitzhugh's mother, and the slain George Phillips wife, was Xwelas (pronounced hwe-LASS), known by the whites as Mary, a S'Klallam woman from the Port Townsend area whose tribe was closely related to the Lummi and Samish peoples who lived in and near the San Juan Islands. Originally married to a man named Edmund Fitzhugh, a prominent white settler in Sehome, near Bellingham, George Phillips was Xwelas' third white husband. Both Fitzhugh and her second husband, a man with the interesting name of William King Lear, had deserted her after each had fathered children with her during years of marriage.

Well known as a hard-drinking man prone to fits of anger and violence, George Phillips was one of the so-called 'Squaw Men' allied with 'Colonel' Enoch May that other, more temperate Orcas Island settlers led by James Tulloch opposed. The gambling and drunken carousing of 'Colonel' May's white friends and their native women living near North Beach didn't sit well with the temperate beliefs of Tulloch and others, who wanted Orcas Island to be populated only by white Christian families, and who were against marriages between whites and native women.

Continued on page 3

From the President...

I am happy to be able to report that the Museum will be blest in three ways this coming year.

First, I think that most of you have already heard that the Museum was chosen to host the Smithsonian travelling exhibit, "Journey Stories", from July 17th through August 29th (more on that elsewhere in the newsletter). This will, of course, be our major project for the year, and I hope to see many of you helping out with set-up/take-down, related events, and acting as docents for the many extra visitors we are expecting.

Secondly, we received word in the same week that the Museum was the recipient of two separate bequests from the estates of former supporters. Each bequest was in the form of a cash payment plus a share in properties that we will eventually realize when they are sold. This is a good lead-in to ask each of you to consider the Museum when writing/reviewing your will. Even a fraction of a property estate, such as the two we are in line for, could give the Museum a significant financial boost.

And lastly, the Museum grounds have been chosen by donors as the site for placement of a community-financed, carved, cedar sculpture. This graceful carving, cut out of pieces of a large cedar tree, was done by Orcas artist Todd Spalti. Todd has drawn upon Salish legend as a basis for his interpretation. The imposing thirteen-foot sculpture, in the form of a heron with human figures tumbling out its back, is planned to go at the northeast corner of the Museum grounds, and should be finished prior to our late May opening. This gift will make the Museum the focal point of the entire area. We are very grateful that we have been selected for placement of this magnificent piece of art.

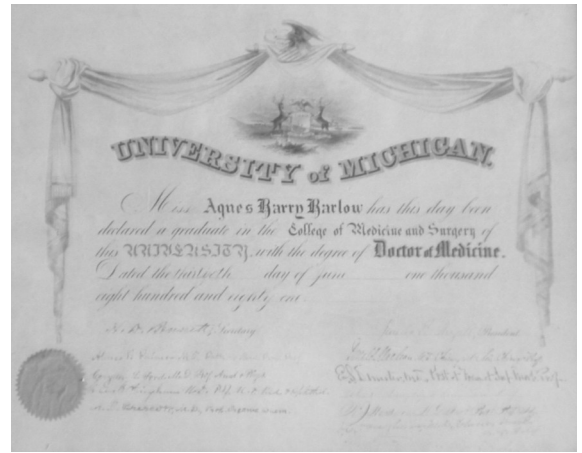
I look forward to getting to know all you Museum volunteers, and as many members as possible over the coming months.

Bill Buchan, President

Women's History Month

Dr. Agnes Barlow Harrison

We are honored to have Dr. Agnes Barlow Harrison's Medical Degree from the University of Michigan. Dr. Harrison, with her husband (also a doctor), founded the Madrona Inn in 1913. The area is now known as Madrona Point. Dr. Agnes Harrison had extensive contact with many Native Americans who needed health care, especially assisting women with births.



SAVE AMERICA'S TREASURES
OFFICIAL PROJECT

Preservation of the Historical Collection is being supported in part by a Federal Save America's Treasures grant administered by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Quilt Fundraiser to benefit the Museum

Some of the Islands most talented quilters and embroiderers have been working diligently on the newest quilt to be raffled by the Orcas Island Historical Museum. This work-of-art will have 12 squares, each depicting an historic vessels that served our islands from the turn-of-the-century until about 1950. Some of these boats represent transport, subsistence, and commerce to the islands. The winner of this year's quilt will also receive a small story-book which will con-

-tain at least one story about a journey each vessel has made. The quilt is being constructed to complement the museum's late-July thru August, "Journey Stories" exhibit from the Smithsonian. Board Member, Denise Wilk, has been instrumental in pulling this project together and says it "has been fun getting to meet the embroider ladies and making the idea come to life." She thanks all the ladies presently working on the project. The vessel names will be added to the quilt by

Gail Mikuchonis, the daughter of long-time islander, Betty Marcum. Tickets will be available for purchase by the end of May. If you would like to be informed when tickets are available please contact the office at 360-376-4849 or email us at orcasmuseum@rockisland.com



Board Member, Denise Wilk, working on quilt. Photo courtesy of the Islands' Sounder.



**A donation was received from Sara Purdue as a
"Memorial to Marjorie Nicol Button."**

Donations "In Memory of Stan Englehartson" were made by:

- Fred and Peg Nicol
- Margaret Philbrick
- John Willis

We need YOU!
**Please contact our
Volunteer
Coordinator,
Leslie Seaman,
at 376-2917**

“XWELAS” continued from page 1

The complex reasons for the intermarriage of natives and whites that took place in the early days of Orcas Island settlement included native traditions, which placed less emphasis on romantic love than on motives of political, economic, or social diplomacy and mobility. Early white men arriving in the sparsely-populated frontier island community nearly totally lacking in unattached white women sought warmth and comfort from the native women. These disparate motivations occasionally produced such ill-fated marriages as that between George Phillips and Xwelas, although they also produced many lasting relationships that later gave rise to prominent island families.

Tried in Port Townsend, Xwelas was convicted of Manslaughter on September 16, 1879, for the shooting of George Phillips. Trial testimony included eyewitness tales of Phillips’ drunken rages and violence toward Xwelas, her account of spending the night before the shooting hiding in the woods with her infant child after his drunken rampage the previous day, and her son’s account of the event. Xwelas served fourteen months in prison for the killing of George Phillips, and in later years lived quietly with her sons Billy Lear and Tom Phillips on the Lummi Reservation. Sometime near the end of World War I, Mary Sehome Fizhugh Lear Phillips – Xwelas – died in her home on the reservation.

JOURNEY STORIES



Journey Stories has been made possible at the Orcas Island Historical Museum by Humanities Washington. Journey Stories is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and the Federation of State Humanities Councils. Support for Museum on Main Street has been provided by the United States Congress.

Smithsonian Institution



The Orcas Island High School Digital Media-Class, led by teacher, Paul Evans, will be interviewing people and editing our *Journey Stories* documentary video. We are so excited to have them involved and we thank them for all their hard work. If you would like to submit your story please contact the museum!

Left to Right: Paul Evans (teacher), Rylan Date, Daniel Briggs, Tara O’Neill, Ripley Fokins, Sorell Hughes, Randall Boetger (back), Mykal Keyes, and Sofie Prewitt.

SPECIAL THANK YOU’S

Thanks to Miles McCoy for taking care of our recycling and trash. We are so grateful to you for continuing to take care of this unseen, but important, aspect of running the museum!

We would like to recognize Bev Madan for taking on the task of transcribing Oral History recordings. This is an important and time-consuming project that we could not undertake without volunteers. We have plenty more to do if anyone is interested!

A HUGE thanks to Robyn Lowe & all our volunteers who have braved the cold this winter & allowed us to stay open on Saturdays!

Thank you to Sue Wood who is constantly sending out membership cards for us. We know it’s a never-ending job so thanks again!

DID YOU KNOW ... “Women’s History Month” was first initiated in 1981 as “Women’s History Week” (the week of March 8) by a Congressional Resolution? In 1987 the National Women’s History Project petitioned Congress to change this weekly event to a month-long celebration. Thank you to all the women who have helped shape history!

Journey Stories Sponsors

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Become a fan of the Orcas Island Historical Museum on FACEBOOK. Updates & special events are sent directly to your Facebook account.

The museum is a recipient of Hotel/Motel Tax dollars. Many thanks to San Juan County, the Islands Lodging Industry and Lodging guests for their very generous support.

Be a Part of the *Journey Stories* Experience! By Andrea Cohen, Journey Stories Chair

The Museum's *Journey Stories* Steering Committee is hard at work setting the stage for this summer's hosting of the Smithsonian's *Journey Stories* exhibition, which depicts immigration, migration, transportation and travel as integral to the American experience. The Committee is busy arranging *Journey Stories*-related events and projects with a number of partnering Orcas institutions and organizations, space planning for the 700 square foot, seven module exhibition, recruiting volunteers and organizing publicity.

On the front burner right now is our creation of a local component of the exhibition. In addition to a display entitled *Destination: Orcas* which will feature the journey stories of six figures from Orcas history, we are working with Orcas High School teacher Paul Evans and his Digital Media class to create a video featuring current Orcas residents telling their own journey stories.

This is where **YOU** come in! We would love for you to be a part of this documentary, which will be shown at the museum during the exhibition. We are hoping that as many of you as possible will come forward and tell your journey story in a video interview with one of the students. We know that many of you have an interesting tale that qualifies as a Journey Story, such as:

- ~ How you or your ancestors came to America
- ~ How or why you came to Orcas Island
- ~ The recounting of a travel experience in the US, recreational or otherwise.
- ~ Your account of building a boat, restoring and/or traveling an ancient or unusual vehicle or work in modern transportation technology

The more journey stories we can gather, the richer our video documentary will be.

By participating in this project, you will not only be enriching the experience of *Journey Stories* visitors, you will be adding your story to the annals of Orcas Island history. If you would like to be interviewed for the video, or if you would like to submit a journey story in writing for our written digest, please contact Heather Wallace in the museum office at 376-4849 or orcasmuseum@rockisland.com. We are in production now so please call soon!