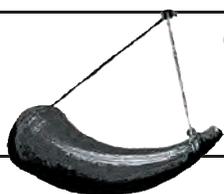


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BECAUSE OUR HISTORY MATTERS

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# Prairie Gazette

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE LAKEWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MARCH - APRIL 2008

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## ***Captain McNeill spent most of his life in Puget Sound***

William Henry McNeill spent much of his life on Puget Sound sailing out of Fort Nisqually, but was a Boston born sailor aboard the *Owyhee* sailing out of Wahoo, Sandwich Islands (that would be Oahu, Hawaii) when he first ventured to the North Pacific in 1822. Two years later the Hudson's Bay Company would build Fort Vancouver, and 10 years before they would begin constructing Fort Nisqually. From 1833 to 1859 Fort Nisqually was the home port of the Hudson's Bay Company "Marine Department" which existed in only McNeill's mind.

Only eighteen years old and already at sea for seven years, McNeill was First Mate on the *Owyhee* with six years in rank. When he took only seven weeks of classroom study he earned his Master Mariner's Certificate. McNeill was hired as captain of the *Convoy* at age 21.

McNeill rose fast in the service of two fine companies; first with Boardman & Pope, then Bryant & Sturgis, before joining the Hudson's Bay Company. The Boston partnerships traded goods to

the North Pacific for the very lucrative fur trade. McNeill could claim, without boasting, that he had brought both companies more favorable trade than any other individual in their employ.

His first command was no coastal tramp. The *Convoy* was much admired as one of the finest two-masted, 200-ton brigantines sailing out of Boston. She had been previously commanded by Captain Dixey Wilde and Captain Josiah Marshall, proud names every Boston boy knew or wanted to know.

McNeill learned quickly which trade goods were well received on the North Pacific coast. His first log listed the usual bales of cotton fabric, duffel, calicoes, pipes, rum, muskets, knives, and other hardware for trade. There were also the crew supplies for a 5-month voyage and some squeaky toys.

Having learned that some Native Americans were intrigued by mechanical toys made in the appearance of small dogs, cats, and other animals, the captain made sure they were on board when he

sailed. These were of great value in making friendships with various chiefs. Friendships enabled better trade relations. Gifts enabled better friendships. It was a simple tactic, even used today by mass merchandisers.

As fate would have it, the *Convoy* sprung a leak in the North Atlantic shortly after leaving Boston in October, 1825. It was very early in the voyage, but the leak would keep crewmembers busy for the remainder of the journey. By January they had reached Cape Horn. After 10 very frustrating days "The Horn" had been rounded, and by February 1 they sighted the Juan Fernandez Islands. Four sailors deserted the ship fearing the Master and the leaky hull. McNeill sold their personal property to the other crew members pocketing \$57.10.

It was only a 40 day passage from there to Oahu. Two more sailors deserted McNeill in Hawaii. His reputation as a hard Master was growing with reason. Some even accused him of "selling" some sailors

**See CAPT. MC NEILL Page 4**



## Lakewood Historical Society

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### Prairie Gazette

Prairie Gazette is the official publication of the Lakewood Historical Society. The newsletter is published six times a year. Distribution is directly to members and available at the Lakewood Historical Museum, 6211 Mt Tacoma Dr. SW, Lakewood, WA 98499

The staff of Prairie Gazette actively encourages input from the Society's members as well as the general public regarding story ideas or any other aspects of this newsletter and the Lakewood Historical Society.

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### MEETINGS

The Lakewood Historical Society formed in 1998 to preserve and share Lakewood's rich history through programs, displays and publications. The Society offers frequent programs on topics of historical interest. Most programs are free and open to the public. Visit the website for information on events and activities.

[www.lakewoodhistorical.org](http://www.lakewoodhistorical.org)

### EDITOR

Dave Sclair  
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## President's Message

This is the time of year when we usually get "cabin fever" and start planning a trip with a sunny climate. In past years John and I have gotten our dose of sunshine by heading south to attend Spring Training in Arizona. We'll have to settle for the sunny warmer weather we've had with the hopes that winter has lost its stranglehold in our area.

In February we started our new hours in the Museum with the opening of new exhibits. We also had an outstanding program on the Buffalo Soldiers at City Hall. It was a truly special evening of celebrating the legacy of African-American military members. Over 100 people attended the event with Society members being outnumbered by our guests. Be sure to mark your calendar for the March and April programs described elsewhere in the newsletter.

The Board has placed renewed emphasis on fund raising efforts this year. We had excellent participation in our "Sound of Music" Command Performance in January. The Business Sponsorship Program will be debut in March with the solicitation of 50 local businesses. Plans are underway for our first signature event on May 10 (see the Special Notice for details). We have high expectations that this will become an annual event.

Another crucial component is the generosity of our loyal members. We greatly appreciate the donations we have received with your membership renewals.

This year we will place more emphasis in promoting our activities especially in the print media. Making presentations to local organizations will also become an integral part in gaining recognition for the Society. Every member should take every opportunity to promote the Society by making announcements to the groups you regularly attend.

It is important that our Board be effective and productive and that can only happen when we have taken the time to build a unified team. Because that cannot be accomplished during the regular monthly meetings, we have scheduled our first Retreat at Lakewood on March 1.

This will give us the time we need to identify our challenges and make plans for solving them. Once we have set our goals we can then enlist our members to support us. We are looking forward to sharing that with you in the next newsletter.

Becky Huber

## *History Museum display depicts early day Post Office*



*Mail boxes with combinations, a money order printing machine, records of shipments and more equipment and artifacts are all available to study*



The Museum Post Office exhibit was sponsored by Sam Brown, a long-time Lakewood resident and supporter, in honor of his friend, the late Emil Auer, who was a well-known stamp dealer and collector.

The post office boxes, counter stool and several postal service artifacts were acquired from the Tacoma Postal Museum's closing auction to create an example of the early post offices found in Lakeview, Lake City, American Lake, Tillicum, Camp Murray and elsewhere before the small communities became Lakewood.

## **CAPT. MCNEILL**

**Continued from Page 1**

to the Russians at Sitka.

A letter to his employers informed them of the leaks and other deficiencies McNeill had discovered during the voyage to the Pacific. His employers letter in return contained "instructions" to correct the problems before some vague future voyage. They showed little respect for McNeill, so he had little compulsion to be polite in return afterwards. He was also upset to be eight days behind his competitors, a delay caused completely by the wait for that nearly insulting letter.

Three ships reached the Queen Charlotte Islands before McNeill's *Convoy* and a sister ship the *Owhyee*. The others were paying what McNeill considered too high a price for furs, so after doing some trading he sailed north to Russian - claimed Territory. He was able to trade there without competition until July 4, 1825 Independence Day. All crew members were given a double allowance of grog to celebrate.

With 800 prime otter skins and 3,000 land furs, they were out of woolen goods. The crew was ill. Five sailors were off duty and the cook was sick. McNeill recorded that he had only "seven men in the Forecastle altogether and four of them sick." Again McNeill ran into trouble with his crew. Eight of the men made "use of mutinous  
**Page 4**

language." McNeill locked them all in the Forecastle, allowing one biscuit and a pint of water to each for a day. This incident didn't prevent the *Convoy* from returning to the Sandwich Islands.

In October the cargo traded for about \$41 per pelt. Each one had cost the investors, on average about \$9 worth of goods. The account books in Boston showed a gross of \$26,235, out of which McNeill was paid a commission of \$905, and a salary of \$290, paid at the rate of \$20 per month. The crew members still with the ship when it arrived in Boston were paid \$6 or \$7 per month. The remainder of the gross went for ship repairs and the investors' profits.

McNeill was assigned as Master of the *SS Beaver* on March 10, 1837. Since the *Beaver* was so much more maneuverable than a sailboat, McNeill added to his beaver trade prowess. Now McNeill could take her to small harbors, little rivers, against the wind and currents and still arrive at a predetermined scheduled time. No village was too small, or too remote. It was a very early front-door delivery service that Native Americans appreciated.

McNeill added to his trading powers by learning his customers' language, personal interests, customs, likes and dislikes. Then he married one of their chiefs! There can be no closer relationships than

family.

McNeill's first wife was Matilda, a Kaigani Chief from Gitradeen, a Nishga village in what is now southeast Alaska. She was a chief in her own right, and her brother was also a chief. Furthermore, she was married to Chief Sakau'an, also a Nishga Kaigani. To avoid any problems of betrayal, frustration, or anger, McNeill negotiated her divorce from Sakau'an. The settlement included the gift of a 40-foot cedar war canoe. It took over four years for the craftsmen to build the canoe, but in the end Sakau'an (Sharp Teeth) was satisfied. The ownership of the 40-foot war canoe proved Sakau'an's superiority without resorting to violence. There is no record of how much McNeill paid for the canoe to be custom built.

In 1841, McNeill ordered the replacement of the steam boilers on the *SS Beaver* that had been in service since 1838. The seawater had eroded the machinery to the point that new boilers were sent from London to be installed at Fort Nisqually. Captain Wilkes of the US Exploratory Expedition was also in port at Nisqually. The two American gentlemen sailors became fast friends during the several months both were occupied at the fort.

It was during this time that Wilkes named an island in Puget Sound off the shores of Steilacoom for his friend Captain McNeill. Unfortunately, in initially

placing the island's new name on the charts, he misspelled the captain's name and it became McNeil Island for posterity.

McNeill never seems to have complained.  
Recommended reading:

*Captain McNeill and His Wife the Nishga Chief*, Robin Percival Smith,

Hancock House, Surrey, B.C., Canada, 2001.

*The Dowager Queen, The Hudson's Bay Company SS Beaver*, William A. Hagelund, Hancock House, Surrey, B.C. 2003.

*The Beaver, First Steamship on the West Coast*, James P. Delgado, Horsdal & Schubart, 1993.

*The Hudson's Bay Company's 1835 Steam Ship Beaver*, John McKay Vanwell Publishing, St. Catherines, Ontario, 2001.

*Occurrences, The Journal of Northwest History During the Fur Trade Era*, Volume XXII Number 3, Summer, 2004 "Spelled with LL: McNeill or Matahell," page four, Jerry V. Ramsey, PhD.

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## ***An Historic Evening: Buffalo Soldiers Ride Again***

**By John Simpson**

Former mayor and retired Lt. Gen. William Harrison had it right when he said: "We've witnessed a wonderful thing here tonight." He was telling the more than 100 who had gathered in the Lakewood City hall to listen to a presentation about the Buffalo Soldiers.

During the one hour presentation "142 Years and Counting: The Legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers," Col. James Manning (ret.), president of the Greater Puget Sound Chapter of the 9th and 10th Cavalry Association, painted an interesting picture of the Buffalo Soldiers' legacy.

The Lakewood Historical Society hosted the event in celebration of Black History month. And ironically, the event occurred on February 12, President Abraham Lincoln's birthday.

In 1866, the Army formed two cavalry regiments (the 9th and 10 Regiments) and two

infantry regiments (the 24th and 25th Regiments) comprised entirely of African American soldiers, Col. Manning explained.

By 1867, the regiments were sent West to fight native Americans and protect settlers, cattle herds and railroad crews. The native Americans gave the troops the name of "Buffalo Soldiers," probably because of the short, dark, curly hair of the African American soldiers resembled the mane of the buffalo.

"Those soldiers were a color guard of pride; they wrote a chapter of pride in our nation's history," said Manning. Emanuel Stance was the first Buffalo Soldier to win the Medal of Honor in June of 1870. Seventeen others have followed him.

And the legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers has a direct connection to the history of the City of Lakewood.

In 1903, Congress approved "An Act to Promote the

Efficiency of the Militia," which provided for joint maneuvers between the local militia and the Army. Areas around American Lake were selected as the sites for the first joint maneuvers, which were scheduled for July 8-17, 1904.

The maneuvers involved infantry, artillery and cavalry actions and were supported by signal and hospital corps personnel. Approximately 4,000 soldiers took part in the exercise. At that time it was the largest military contingent ever to assemble in Washington.

At the end of the training, Maj. Gen. Arthur MacArthur conducted a review. Other maneuvers were conducted in the same area in 1906, 1908, 1910 and 1912. The Army's interest in the region culminated in the establishment of Camp Lewis in 1917.

"And an integral part of those maneuvers was the work of the Buffalo Soldiers," pointed out Manning.

**LAKWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM  
MUSEUM FUND CONTRIBUTORS  
February 15, 2008**



**Lakewood History Museum**

*Thank You,  
Museum Fund  
Donors and Sponsors*  
**Gifts: \$24,602**

Goal: \$100,000 by July 31, 2009  
for Operations, Education, Exhibits,  
Programs and Community Outreach

**City of Lakewood Lodging Tax**  
supports museum promotions

**SPONSORS**

Comcast  
Water Rights Inc.  
Freelance Graphics (In-Kind)  
Paktex Inc (In-Kind)  
Robi's Camera (In-Kind)  
SIGNsations (In-Kind)  
The Business Examiner (In-Kind)  
The Suburban Times (In-Kind)

**New Foundation Donors**

Doris Beyl  
Ann Kirk Davis  
Linda Van Dyk  
Jack K. Gamble, MG USAF Ret.  
Dr. William and Andrea Gernon

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Ray and Grace Graves  
Bill and Jo Harrison  
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Clark and Sharon Montgomery  
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Patricia Stolp  
Michael and Mary Jo Tucci  
Dr. and Mrs. John Winters  
Harriet Wolverton

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Delores Bloch  
Jeff Conner  
Linda Forkenbrock  
Sandra Godfrey  
Ray and Janice Graves  
Brad Jones  
Hank Kaihara  
Joseph Lewis  
James Manning  
Dave and Lindy O'Keeffe  
Wilma and Lawrence Peterson  
Marc and Brenda Rix  
John and Melanie Simpson  
Adele Stevens  
Johnny and Lucinda Williams

**2007 Achievements  
Summary of Achievements**

Lakewood HistoryMuseum  
First Anniversary – October

Visitors: Estimated 419 visitors of  
whom 8 % were from out-of-area.

Hours: 2007 – 20 hours per  
week, expanding to 30 hours per  
week for 2008.

Exhibits: Permanent displays:  
Lakewood timeline and maps;  
Prairie settlement (1850-1890);  
Open for Businesses and Local  
post office.

Docents: 31 volunteers serving 2  
to 8 hours per month

PR & Marketing: Brochures  
printed and distributed

Website: 43,836 hits thru Dec.  
31, 2007; links to museums and  
cultural centers throughout the  
state.

Membership: 205 - 41% increase  
from Jan. 1 thru Dec. 31, 2007

Signage: six directional signs  
installed

Public programs: 10 programs  
on local history attended by 338  
attendees

Outreach and Education:  
Programs presented at various  
civic, schools and community  
organizations

Newsletter: 6 8-page bi-monthly  
publication mailed to members,  
donors and distributed at City Hall  
and other places

Fund drive: 126 donors  
contributed \$25,462, raffle \$2,710

Sponsorships: \$10,372

Grants: received 3 for \$53,500

**LAKESWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
FINANCIAL REPORT  
December and Twelve (12) Months YTD 200  
December 31, 2007 - Prepared 01/08/2008**

<b>Cash on Hand</b>	<b>11/30/2007</b>	<b>12/31/2006</b>
Checking	\$1650.53	\$ 5417.72
Money Market	\$8465.93	\$ 1061.35
Certificate of Deposit	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$10,701.60 (a)</u>
Total	\$10,116.46	\$17,180.67

<b>Income</b>	<b>December 2007</b>	<b>12 Months 2007 YTD</b>
Grants	\$ 0.00	\$46,413.16 (b)
Memberships	\$ 840.00	\$ 6835.00
Donations - Museum Fund	\$2981.00	\$25,254.39
Sponsorships	\$ 0.00	\$ 1000.00
Special Fund Raisers	\$ 440.00	\$ 3400.00
Bank Interest	\$ 38.36	\$ 430.52
Other	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$ 380.26</u>
Total Income	\$4299.36	\$83,716.33

**Expenses**

Operations & Administration	\$ 629.74	\$ 3338.94
Web site	\$ 30.00	\$ 405.00
Contract Services	\$ 0.00	\$48,423.00 (c)
Insurance	\$ 0.00	\$ 1927.00
Museum lease	\$ 0.00	\$21,600.00
Museum exhibits	\$ 156.11	\$ 3692.27
Postage, copies & printing	\$ 470.00	\$ 3578.37
Fund Raising	\$ 0.00	\$ 2475.00
Raffle (Airline Tickets)	\$ 0.00	\$ 920.58
Marketing/Publicity	\$ 455.00	\$ 1677.50
Other	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$ 184.37</u>
Total Expenses	\$1740.85	\$88,222.03

**Closing Cash on Hand 12/31/2007**

Checking	\$ 2414.68	\$ 2414.68
Money Market	\$ 10,260.29	\$10,260.29
Certificate of Deposit	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$ 0.00</u>
Total	\$12,674.97	\$12,674.97

(a) \$5756.57 transferred to Money Market account 2/13/07

\$5105.98 transferred to Money Market account 7/14/07

(b) Includes \$18,722.53 received from 2006 City of Lakewood Grant

(c) Includes \$28,077.00 paid for 2006 Contract Services

## **March - April Programs and Exhibits**

**March 18 - 7 pm**

Lakewood Library - 6300 Wildaire Rd SW

### **William H. McNeill, the Captain of the S.S. Beaver**

Dr Jerry Ramsey, historian and Fort Nisqually Living History Museum volunteer, will portray William McNeill, an American fur trader hired by Hudson's Bay Company in 1836 to captain the S. S. Beaver, the first steamship on Puget Sound.

**April 15 – 7 pm**

Park Lodge School, 6300 – 100<sup>th</sup> Street SW

### **Early Schools of Lakewood**

Becky Huber will discuss the formation of the early education provided to the residents of the Lakewood area. Byrd School, built in 1855 on the site of the current Park Lodge Elementary School, was the first school house built north of the Columbia River. By the 1920's five school districts were organized to provide elementary education to the growing population of the Lakes District. In 1928 the Clover Park School District was formed primarily through the efforts of Iva Alice Mann and Arthur G. Hudtloff.

### **Special Notice!**

Be sure to put the evening of May 10 on your calendar.

We are planning a fund raising event tentatively called "A Saturday in Spring Concert" featuring the nationally known jazz pianist, Jeremy Ryan. Also scheduled to participate are local high school musicians.

Watch for more information about what promises to be an outstanding and fun event for the entire community as well as a great fund-raiser for the museum.

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### **School Days, school days**

Do you have Lakewood area school memorabilia you can share for our upcoming exhibit on our early schools? We need items related to Lakewood area schools. Our local history has run the gamut: public, private, church, one-room schoolhouse to the community college and much in between.

The Museum has a school desk from Visitation Villa, photos of the one room Custer School, documents, clippings, and other items. A recent acquisition was Hudtloff and Mann Jr. High pennants from the early 1960s and other items, a donation from Tim Marsh, a Lakes High grad.

We're looking for whatever you thought was important and may have saved that will showcase Lakewood schools through the years. We plan to recreate a mini-classroom scene from the 1940s-60s era.

The display is planned for April through June and could extend through the summer. Please contact Janda Volkmer, 253-222-7941 or [jandavolkmer@msn.com](mailto:jandavolkmer@msn.com)

Lakewood Historical Society  
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