Colorful Characters & Local Lore

EXHIBIT DATES: May 24, 2008 – April 26, 2009
LOCATION: Anacortes Museum
In the 1910 Carnegie Bldg
1305 8th St., Anacortes, WA
TELEPHONE: 360-293-1915
MUSEUM HOURS: Mon.—Sat. 10—4, Sun. 1—4,
closed Wednesday

The Anacortes Museum
WELCOME TO THE PARTY!
Come & mingle with some of the fascinating characters who’ve helped shape Fidalgo & Guemes Islands.

Bubbles may be the life of the party, but we’re also wild about Harry. Betty & Berte, Mae-Louise & Maria, Dave, Larry & no fewer than four Bills …they’re all here. Including a little guy badly in need of a shave.

There’s no shortage of colorful characters on Fidalgo & Guemes. We discovered that when trying to choose just 24 of them.

Countless folks who live outside the box have made these islands their home. “For a long time people have called this the ‘Edge,’” says one of those characters, Bill Mitchell. “It’s always kind of had a little postscript on the end that says, well, it’s not really the edge, but you can see it from here.”

The people we’ve spotlighted are fairly well known to the community by virtue of their unusual achievement, lifestyle or personality. Most live on only in memory or legend; six are happily still with us. Many are regular rainbows of color & difficult to capture on one small panel. We’ve supplemented some of those folks with albums for a fuller appreciation of their lives.

We’ve also provided a way for you to add any recollections of your own or to note a colorful local you think should definitely be at the party.

The same goes for the oddball tales that have grown up around Fidalgo & Guemes. Know of a good one we missed? Tell us! These are the stories, true or not, that bring our community vividly to life.

Now come on in & rub elbows with a few of our favorite folks.

Colorful character Henrietta “Bubbles” Finley
The founder of Anacortes arrived on Fidalgo Island in 1876 & became a one-man, town-building dynamo.

Over the next six years, he constructed a wharf & set up a post office & general store. He opened an engineering company, a real estate firm, a pile-driving service & a scow-building company. He became the town’s notary public. He established the first sawmill & founded the town’s first newspaper, the *Northwest Enterprise*. Somewhere in all of that he found time to play the cornet & organize a brass band.

When it came to Anacortes, Bowman was a brass band all to himself, trumpeting the town’s potential across the country. The energetic visionary bent his powers of persuasion to promoting Anacortes as the “New York of the West,” a rail & industrial center of “unsurpassable excellence.”

Born in Canada, Bowman moved to the U.S. while still a child. He graduated from the University of New York with a degree in journalism & then worked for the *New York Tribune*. In 1868, he traveled to California where, spurred by the gold fever, he left for Germany to earn a degree in civil & mining engineering. He later returned to California & headed up the state’s geological survey.

While doing survey work in Puget Sound & British Columbia, Bowman discovered the island that would become the object of his obsession. In Fidalgo he saw a shining future as the western terminus of the transcontinental railway.

In 1877, Bowman bought 168 acres at the foot of what is now Commercial Avenue. He sent for his family & bestowed wife Anne Curtis’ name on the tiny community known as Ship Harbor. Then Bowman got down to the business of building a town worthy to serve as a major railway terminus.

Western port cities competed fiercely for that honor. The charismatic Bowman put his back into it, traveling as far as New York to negotiate with railway promoters. He drew maps spotlighting Anacortes & saw they made their way to railroad men across the country. One of his maps shamelessly positioned Anacortes as pretty much the center of the known world.

Despite all of his efforts, the train ended up in Tacoma. Bowman died believing his “endless quest” to create a destination town had failed.

If he could see Anacortes today, he might think otherwise.
olor doesn’t always come in bold hues. Whatever Barbara Amerman lacked in flash, she made up for with a saintly spirit that brightens the memories of those who knew her.

“She was probably the most compassionate individual I have ever known. She didn’t have a car, but that didn’t stop her from marching all over town making sure people got the things they needed,” recalls Jim Funk. His brother Wallie dubs her an “Angel of Mercy. All you had to do to start a fund drive was to tell her a sad story.”

Amerman became head of the local Red Cross during WWII. Walking over a mile to & from work every day, she ran the chapter for thirty years, retiring in 1975.

Under her guidance, the Anacortes Red Cross moved beyond military & disaster assistance to offer such programs as first aid & homemaking classes, quilts for the needy, holiday cheer programs & swim lessons.

A fixture for years outside the Post Office selling poppies for wounded vets, Amerman created an apartment in her home for service families in need. After the war, it served as a haven for the homeless.

Angels of Mercy don’t take holidays & “Mrs. Red Cross” was no exception. “One Christmas night she remarked that it was the first holiday that she had not received an emergency phone call,” recalls daughter Sally Scott. “What a surprise to her to learn that her phone was out of order!”

One of Amerman’s constant worries was whether or not youngsters had decent shoes. She created the Shoe Fund, bringing children into the store herself to make sure they were properly fitted.

Children were the main beneficiaries of the Christmas Cheer program, which provided baskets of food, clothes & toys. It was a program Amerman was so devoted to that when she developed cancer, she begged her doctor to postpone her operation until after the holidays.

Neighor Mary Luvera said “She went way beyond the call of duty. If there was a needy family & the Red Cross funds were all gone, she would reach into her own pocket & that was some-thing she could ill afford to do.”

Amerman received no compensation from the National Red Cross but was paid from local fund drives. “Every time we tried to raise her salary, she refused the raise because she felt the community needed it more,” says Jim Funk. “You don’t find many people like that in the world.”

Color Barbara Amerman a blessing.
Berte Olson 1882-1959

UNSINKABLE FERRY SKIPPER

Berte Olson was a woman who took the bull by the horns. In her case, the bull was a ferry & the horns the honking kind.

The "Tugboat Annie of Hood's Canal," Olson was the first woman to skipper a ferry on Puget Sound. Tiny & tough, she ran two ferryboat companies between 1920 & 1950.

Born on Whidbey Island, Berte was the daughter of a ship's carpenter & the oldest of fourteen children, many of whom became fishermen. But the closest Berte came to working by water was her job in a laundry.

Eventually she married the skipper of a small troller. While he fished in Alaska, Berte remained landbound with twin sons.

It must have grated. In 1920, when the family moved to Dewey Beach on Fidalgo, Berte saw a notice requesting bids for a Deception Pass ferry.

Berte bid. Berte scored. She fired off a telegram to Alaska: COME HOME STOP WE OWN FERRY LINE STOP LOVE STOP

The couple took on a partner & towed two car-carrying scows from Yokoko Point on Fidalgo to Whidbey's Hoytus Point. Berte got her operator's license, cooked for the crews, helped with repairs & kept the books.

Soon the Olsons bought out their partner & purchased a double-ender big enough to carry twelve Model Ts. Son Ivan says the family ferried lots of hearse across the pass. An epidemic? "They were full of moonshine!"

Fifty cents a car, ten cents a passenger. It added up to a tidy living, secure but for one thing: bridges.

In 1929, the Legislature voted unanimously for a Deception Pass bridge. The vote might have deterred a lesser woman from heading to Olympia but not Berte. "Mother was a talker," says Ivan. "She'd go right to the Governor. She'd pull strings...."

Berte convinced Gov. Hartley to veto the bill & for six more years her ferry chugged across Deception Pass. But in 1933, under a new governor, the legislation passed.

The bridge opened in 1935, the Olsons divorced & Berte left Fidalgo. Broke, she convinced Captain Peabody of the Blackball Line to stake her purchase of the Port Gamble-Shine run in Hood's Canal. She operated & captained that run until 1950.

State Senator Paul Luvana once told Ivan he couldn't understand how Berte "could go down to Olympia with no money & stop the bridge." Others wondered how a slip of a woman held her own & more in a man's world.

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Betty Lowman was a powerhouse who would “drown myself before I'd let anybody say, 'I told you a girl couldn’t do it.'”

Born in Anacortes, Betty was the oldest child followed by four brothers. She swam across Guemes Channel at age fourteen & later swam ten miles to Cypress. She flew down hills standing on her bicycle, swam-dived from yardarms & hoped to enter the Olympics as a discus thrower. As high school valedictorian, she talked about “Women in Athletics” despite disapproving town folk who “thought my topic most unsuitable.”

Her father, Ray Lowman, gave her a dug-out canoe when she turned 18. She named it Rifaafi after her brothers & decided to row to Alaska but Ray insisted on college first. In 1937, four days after graduating with a journalism degree from the University of Washington, Lowman rowed north.

Without telling Ray, he was in Alaska & upon hearing the news, he called on the Coast Guard to stop her. Too late. Betty was off on a 66-day adventure, at one point losing everything but the dugout & her sleeping bag. She fashioned a paddle from bark, finished the journey at Ketchikan & returned home to wild acclaim.

After her return, she worked on a reef netter & became the first woman admitted to the Fishermen's Union of the Pacific. She broke another barrier in 1939 by signing on with a halibut schooner fishing the Gulf of Alaska. “She worked like a Trojan & wanted to do everything,” reported the skipper, who awarded her a “man's share” of the catch.

In 1940, she was shipwrecked off Nova Scotia when the schooner she was crewing on hit a rock. She spent three days on an uninhabited island before being rescued by lobster fishermen, then hiked 143 miles to Halifax. Too proud to contact her family for money, she found work.

When an evening swim took her past destroyers in the military zone, Betty was accused of being a spy. Kicked out of Canada, she eventually made train fare home & met husband-to-be Neil Carey along the way.

After their two sons were grown, Betty & Neil moved to an isolated cove in the Queen Charlotte Islands & lived a new adventure there for 20 years. They now live in Sandspit, B.C., about 100 miles from where Betty ended her remarkable canoe trip.
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Through little more than five feet high, Bill Lowman was larger than life. He brought a baby gorilla into his Anacortes home, hosted music nights complete with crazy hats & fished commercially into his eighties.

Lowman studied naval architecture in college but quit a year before graduating because he couldn’t fathom life behind a desk. He would make his living on the water.

He eventually skippered the Vindicator, a 135-foot naval minesweeper converted to a fishing vessel. Always up for a challenge (and with a fifth of whiskey at stake), Lowman once steered the Vindicator into threadlike Canoe Pass, where the boat risked being ripped by rocks above & below water. He won the bet, then reversed course & did it again. Somewhat ironically, the Vindicator hit a submerged reef & sank off Alaska in 1955.

Lowman fished his last boat, the Zig Zag, for over forty years. Dave Milholland, who sold Lowman the 36-foot gillnetter, recalls how his friend broke both ankles when accidentally knocked from a dock to a concrete float. When the doctor didn’t take him quickly enough, Lowman steamed off & made stilts by tying 2x4s behind his knees. “You’ll never find a person tougher,” says Milholland.

A president of the Puget Sound Gillnetters Association, Lowman was riled by the Boldt decision, which gave Indians half the commercial salmon catch. According to daughter Claudia, he “lived, breathed & ate the situation every day for several years.” Protesting the perceived injustice wherever he could, he posed with an arrow through his head, drove the matter to the Supreme Court & even wrote & published a book about a “teepeegate,” his term for a conspiracy.

Though most Anacortes folks know Lowman for his gorilla Bobo, fewer know how he rescued an orphaned seal from Chinese laborers arguing over who would have it for dinner. He taught “Briney Deep” how to fish in the bathtub & even took the seal on a car trip, drawing crowds when he hosed off the animal at gas stations.

Lowman’s spirit embraced not only animals, but the young & the old. At retirement homes, he played accordion & shared his kazoo & Charlie Chaplin films. He turned more than one Anacortes boy’s life around with lessons in boxing & sportsmanship, built a dock at his own expense for local kids, repaired bikes to give away & roller-skated – backwards – with his two daughters.

Big-hearted, fun-loving, hard-headed, tough as a marlinspike – “Bobo’s dad” was all that & then some.
Bill Mitchell is proud of the fact that people act as if he weren’t in a wheelchair. “They treat me as badly as they’d treat anyone who irritated the hell out of them.”

Why would some folks happily push Mitchell off a dock? For one thing, he’s a bit of a gadfly, constantly pressing preservation of things few find worth saving. Passionate about history, he won’t hesitate to buttonhole folks & bend ears about his latest cause, whether it’s trying to save a cannery bunkhouse, a local cathouse, or an historic tug rotting in Fidalgo Bay.

He rarely wins his battles, but Mitchell doesn’t waste time stewing. There’s too much to do & keeping busy is “my main painkiller.”

The oldest of three boys, Bill was born in Shreveport & came to Anacortes at age two. He lived near Bobo & feels having a gorilla as a friend early on is bound to “rub off a little.”

His mother was an Anacortes gal who married a Marine. Bill’s love of history was stoked on family trips back to Louisiana that involved stopping along the way at “every roadside geyser, pile of rocks, Indian cave, dinosaur digs….” Consequently “I had a wider view of the world than the rest of the kids.”

At age 22, he rolled his sportscar on Whidbey Island & broke his neck. But he discovered he could draw again, “that my eye & hand still worked together, & I still had the imagination.” He later put those talents to use in a number of ways that included cartooning & creating the Anacortes Mural Project. “I try to do the best I can,” he says, “with the cards I’ve been dealt.”

Bill has hitch-hiked – in his wheelchair – from here to Canada & down through California. “The only people who would pick me up were the best of the best.” Of course, there were a few wild cards “who maybe put my life in danger.” But it all added up to some lively stories for a fellow who loves to talk.

One way he enjoys sharing history is through tours of his home, which is stuffed with artifacts from skulls to African masks. The ceiling is the only open space, deliberately left uncluttered so as not to “overwhelm” his visitors.

Immediately recognizable around town in his distinctive 1954 Autoette, Mitchell keeps the cart olive drab because “I’m trying to hide in plain sight. If you’re too colorful,” he says, “you’ve got to tone it down some to be able to slip under the radar.”
If it's olive-drab, I have a hard time turning it down,” says the man who owns two Mig-23 fighters, 15 jeeps & more. Heads turn when he rolls through Anacortes in his British Abbott gun carrier.

Bill Wooding is a “walking encyclopedia” on military history & has collected olive-drab equipment all his life. When he was 15, he traded bayonets for a jeep body & built his first car.

The owner of Lake Erie Trucking believes “the best thing I've got going for me is my mechanical ability.” That, & a healthy disdain for the word “can't.”

Wooding’s can-do spirit was instilled by a father who once dropped the teenager & his brother in the Canadian bush & told them to build a sawmill. Years later he drove a trashed pickup from Auburn to Anacortes by hanging a gas can from the mirror & running a siphon to the carburetor.

Duct tape, wire ties, whatever works, says daughter Lisa. “If you were stranded in the middle of someplace you would want him to be there.”

Wooding ran the Union Oil gas station in Anacortes for a couple of years, worked in construction & engine repair at Skyline Marina & as a mechanic on cargo planes for the air force.

At Lake Erie Trucking, his “business partner” for the last seven years or so has been Sassy, a schnauzer Wooding readily admits is “spoiled.” She sits at the dinner table & rides, with earplugs, in his helicopter. If he’s running an excavator, she watches where the bucket goes, then plops there until picked up.

Though Sassy gets a free pass, Wooding knows he can be tough to work for. He thinks it's because his father never gave him two chances & “I kind of pass that on. I've been maybe too hard on people sometimes.”

Nonetheless, he’s a “people person” who treats friends & employees every Friday at a local pizza joint, & relishes the overseas contacts made through buying equipment. He sponsored a girl from Prague who stayed summers at his home & is working to bring another over from Hanoi.

His own community has also benefited from his firm belief in giving back. Though he hated Anacortes when he came here as a teenager, now “you couldn’t drag me away with horses.” That affection has been quietly displayed through donations to the schools, skateboard park, ballfields, homeless shelter & more.

Still, Wooding is known mostly for those trucks & tanks. His latest purchase is an amphibious personnel carrier he hopes to have on hand for opening day. “I told my grandson I got a new fishing boat.”
Bobo 1951-1968

ANACORTES’ FAVORITE SON

To Bill Mitchell, he was just the “black, hairy kid” from up the block. But to Anacortes, to a country that discovered him through newsreels & Life magazine, Bobo was a sensation.

In 1951, Bill Lowman paid $4000 to a big-game hunter for a baby gorilla. Lowman had read about apes & was fascinated to learn “there were these animals that close to being human.”

His mother Jean, who took over Bobo’s care, felt likewise. She “poured out all my love & tenderness to make a little human out of him rather than facing the fact he was a gorilla.”

Jean consulted primate experts on how to care for her new charge. She bathed & oiled him daily, kept notes on his behavior & dressed him like a proper boy.

Bobo sat in a high chair where he was fed with a spoon & drank tea from a mug. He broke dishes regularly & raided the cupboard, liking foods better when “snitched,” noted Jean. Tabasco made him “dance a jig on the window ledge after he got a taste.”

The phone had a box over it, the windows were covered with chicken wire & a mousetrap protected the bookshelves. Bill’s brother-in-law Neil Carey once watched Bobo catch the family dog by the tail, topple him & “with no effort slide the unhappy animal across the smooth wood floor.”

Bobo wrestled with Bill & created chaos at his daughters’ tea parties. He daydreamed at the window with his favorite pillow & snapped off the television when he craved attention.

He received so much attention from Anacortes, the Lowmans finally posted a notice in the local paper limiting visits so the gorilla, & the family, could have some peace.

Carey says that when Bill’s father came home after a hard day as a stonemason, he & Bobo would head upstairs to listen to the evening news. “Sometimes later I might find both asleep, Bobo wrapped safely in Dad’s muscular arm. That may have been the only time my mother-in-law got any rest.”

When he became too big for the house (“Imagine a three-year-old child with the strength of a seventeen-year-old,” said Bill), the traumatic decision was made to place Bobo with the Woodland Park Zoo. The move was especially hard for Jean, who lived at the zoo for three weeks to help with the transition.

A star attraction at the zoo until he died of a blood clot, Bobo’s pelt is now on display at the Museum of History & Industry in Seattle.
Believing “one can’t be original & proper,” Bubbles ditched decorum for a life lived on her own terms. She dropped one fiancé after a long engagement, married three others & barnstormed local towns as a scantily-dressed dancer.

Born in North Dakota, she was handed off to her namesake grandmother. The pair came to Anacortes about 1909, where the older Henrietta married & settled at 9th Street & M Avenue.

Grandma was something of a free spirit herself. She “taught me how to think,” & bought Bubbles her first canoe, allowing the girl to paddle alone & camp on nearby islands. Bubbles “would sit there happily, listening to the owls & thinking how different I was from the other girls with their Eastern Star mothers who constantly told them to cross their ankles & be little ladies.”

She’d paddle her dragon-painted canoe with dog in bow, gun across lap & often a buck athwartships. Throughout her life she felt at home in the wilderness, camping & hunting alone on islands from here to Alaska.

Her grandmother bought land on Guemes Island’s West Beach & there Bubbles built her first cabin at age sixteen. After taking a hatchet to booty left on her beach by rumrunners, she found the cabin burnt to the ground in revenge. Rumor has it she strapped on pistols & went after the thugs, but she later said her grandmother waylaid her with gifts of a fur coat & bear gun.

Bubbles built other homes at the site, wonderlands formed from a fertile imagination & beach-combed treasures. Out of driftwood, shells, skulls, cement & more arose a host of bizarre beings that included two dragons at her door. Liten Lodge’s main room was molded from cement so cushions & rugs could be removed & dirt hosed down a central drain.

Childless, Bubbles opened heart & home to strays, kids from broken homes & others. She threw parties people long remembered & posted signs through-out her house on how to be a good guest.

A gifted artist, Bubbles cartooned her escapades, sewed quilts & crafted exotic costumes. While still a young woman she toured locally as a magician’s assistant and Oriental dancer, “Ming Toy.” When an aunt caught the show, she ordered her niece to “put on some clothes & come home!”

As on why Henrietta was called “Bubbles.” In later years, she insisted it was “One Bubble,” & that’s how it is on her gravestone. There are no dates on the stone, which somehow seems appropriate.

Bubbles, singular or plural, was timeless.
As one of Fidalgo Island’s first white settlers, Charles Beale faced down wolves & charges of “notorious fornication” for living with an Indian woman.

Hardly the sort of things one might expect to befall a bookkeeper from Virginia. But as a young man, Beale caught the gold bug & headed west. Gold fever turned into a torturous bout of mountain fever & he arrived in California in 1851 unable to walk. When he recovered, Beale worked in the Sierra goldmines & later headed to the Fraser River goldfields.

His claim there didn’t fulfill hopes & Beale became a riverboat captain instead. In 1858, he spent the winter in Port Townsend & nearly lost his life when his flatboat was wrecked in a storm while crossing the water to Whatcom. After making landfall on Whidbey Island, he worked for a while in a logging camp, then took off on a hunting trip to Guemes Island.

Caught in another storm upon leaving Guemes, Beale left the prayers to his quivering companion & “forced the frightened Indians to paddle at the point of a gun.” The group put in on Fidalgo Bay.

Captivated by the wild lands of Fidalgo, Beale organized a party of five to return in 1859. The group took up squatters’ rights on what is now March’s Point & established the first permanent white settlement in Skagit County.

During the hard winter that followed, Beale shot a deer on Mt. Erie & packed it on his back through deep snow to what is now Weaverling Spit. Darkness fell & wolves, “great, gaunt, grey fellows,” followed Beale’s bloody trail to the spit. Escaping with the carcass into the water, he stood in the deadly cold until rescued by a friend with a canoe.

Three years later, Beale got the gold itch again & headed to Cariboo, B.C., leaving his land in charge of his cousin. On his return in 1866, he found his claim had been sold. Undaunted, he crossed the bay & staked another claim in the area of what is now 35th Street & V Avenue.

Beale lived with Julia, a Lummi Indian, & in 1878 was charged with not being legally married to her. Three months before the trial he legalized the relationship but not without protest. He hired a lawyer to query the court as to the meaning of the term “marriage.”

As Anacortes grew, Beale’s life became more settled. He had eight children, served as a justice of the peace, sold real estate & fired imaginations with hair-raising yarns.

Throughout his life, Gant peppered a multitude of newspapers with phrases that left little doubt as to his take on everything from politics to religion.

His world-view may have reflected an unconventional life that began in Nashville in 1867. Claiming to have run away from home & a tyrannical stepfather at age seven, Gant later taught himself to read. Over the years he devoured history, philosophy, & the classics, wrote hundreds of poems & eventually learned the printing trade.

As a roving newspaperman, Gant made his way west. In 1904, he became editor of the Anacortes American. He married an Anacortes woman & in 1908, the couple moved to Gray’s Harbor. There Gant edited a paper for a year before again moving on, this time leaving behind “badly tangled” accounts, as well as Mrs. Gant.

After stints on several other papers, Gant came to Guemes Island in 1912 & edited The Tillikum. The newspaper was only about a year old when Gant apparently went on a bender.

An engineer recalls slowing his train as it came into Anacortes because Gant would be lying besotted on the tracks. Why the drinking binges? There are hints of a tragic past, rumors of a family lost in a fire. Whatever the reason, Gant had numerous friends to bail him out.

Departing Guemes after The Tillikum failed, Gant returned in 1916 to edit the Guemes Beachcomber, a paper “Published every Thursday in the Interests of the Heartbeats of Humanity.”

In his newspapers, Gant called it as he saw it in Technicolor phrases. Anacortes pioneer Gus Hensler noted that Gant hated “only sham & humbug.” If that meant someone needed to be scolded as “a blistering, blustering, barnstorming, blue-bottling, blatherskite,” Gant was by-god up to it.

But his words could be as lyrical as they were withering. Gant’s most effusive descriptions were reserved for his beloved Northwest, which he promoted with a passion. He published two volumes of poetry under the title Songs of the Sea & eventually became known as the “Songbird of the San Juan Archipelago.”

In 1927, Gant wrote for the Bellingham Herald for over a year before suffering a fatal stroke as he waited to catch a boat for Orcas.

Poet, newsman & community booster, Gant was a songbird of rare talent. And a very sharp peck.
Dave Milholland 1921-

MECHANICAL WIZARD

Dave Milholland says anyone can bring old machinery back to life, that “it just takes a little time.”

A shot of Milholland’s mechanical wizardry wouldn’t hurt. Friend Frank Orr, who has worked on one engine for several years, says “I’ve seen Dave take an engine in the same situation & within a year’s time have it in operation again.”

Milholland learned to keep machines running as a young man working at his family’s fishing resort. “If there was any maintenance needed, I would have to figure out how to do that.” During WWII, he honed his make-do skills in the army air forces. As a motor sergeant, he’d sneak under the fence into a Moroccan impound area & “liberate” the parts needed to fix trucks.

When he left the service in 1945, his family bought land at Deception Pass, put in a lumberyard & built another fishing resort. He also ran the Anacortes bus service. He’d put in eight hours in the lumber business, then come home & bus folks to movie shows till midnight. “If I had to put in a new clutch or something I’d do that at night, then vacuum out the bus before I quit & maybe wash it so it’d be nice & clean in the morning.”

That love for machines shows today in the antique engines & cars that sparkle & chug with new life under his care. His amazing collection fills several buildings & includes a 1914 Model T roadster, an Atlas Imperial engine & machines that grind rocks, pump water & spray steam to thaw culverts.

What’s more, he can tell you the history behind each. His own past is tied to the 1917 Anacortes Junk Co. truck he drove for Mike Demopoulos in 1950 & spent years resurrecting. Today, he & wife Dorothy turn heads when they take the truck out for its annual spin.

But restoration has always been just a hobby for Milholland, who fished commercially until he was 85. He’s also a fishing-rights activist who has been told he “comes on too strong,” but who will admit he’s “done a lot of good for the fishermen.” Dorothy notes that he still follows the fishing news & “jumps up & down, going ‘what’s the matter with those people!’”

A neighbor once threw a “what’s the matter with you?” at Milholland when he brought home a Model T tractor, but he shrugged it off. For him, “I just think saving some of these things is really important.”
Harry Smith 1923-1991

MUSICOLOGIST, COLLECTOR, ECCENTRIC

Anacortes saw only a foreshadowing of the man who became an abstract painter, musicologist, compulsive collector, avant-garde filmmaker & full-on eccentric.

In 1932, Harry Smith was enrolled at Whitney School in Anacortes. His father was a watchman at a local cannery where Harry filled a room with curiosities from arrowheads & pottery to snakes preserved in jars. Wallie Funk recalls the room contained “everything the sea would cough up.”

Harry’s Fidalgo gleanings formed just one of many collections. He went on to gather rubber doll heads, tarot cards, Ukrainian Easter eggs, early American folk records & the world’s largest assortment of paper airplanes (later donated to the Smithsonian).

Smith attended the University of Washington, but a trip to Berkeley convinced him that a world flavored with pot & bohemians was a better place for his mental gifts.

He dropped out of school & moved to the Bay Area in 1947, where he began to explore the connections between color, sound & movement. Instead of shooting a film, he would painstakingly paint it (two minutes took two years to complete). Or he’d capture a song on canvas by making each brush stroke represent a note.

Eventually Smith moved to New York & soon fell on hard times. He visited Folkways Records to sell his record collection for some needed cash but was instead offered a contract to compile an anthology of the music.

In 1952, the masterfully annotated, six-record Anthology of American Folk Music was released & became Smith’s seminal work. It’s a collection friend Allen Ginsberg called a “historic bomb in American folk music.” Eighty-four raw roots tracks from 1927-1932 inspired a whole new generation of musicians.

Smith spent his last years lecturing at the Naropa Institute in Boulder. In 1991, the same year he received a Lifetime Achievement Grammy, he died in a New York hotel.

It’s questionable if anyone in Anacortes knew about or mourned his passing. But that wouldn’t have bothered Harry. Life, as he put it, was “only an illusion anyhow.”
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It’s probably safe to say the Smith family raised a few eyebrows in Anacortes. Harry’s parents lived in separate houses & were Theosophists who encouraged unconventional thinking. Harry himself, according to neighbors, was “strange” & something of a geek.

The Smiths moved to Bellingham in 1942. Fascinated by anthropology, young Harry recorded native songs & rituals & worked on a dictionary of native dialects. He was featured in American Magazine for his work with local Indians & was shown recording a Lummi spirit dance.

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At age 76, Julia Haroldson dreamed of trading land for a green convertible & driving to Crater Lake with the top down.

She was two when she came from Iowa to the island where Anacortes was still just a glint in Amos Bowman’s eye. After a year working a farm, the family left for Oregon. They returned when Julia was six & Amos had named his town.

In 1882, the Haroldsons bought a forty-acre farm at Alexander Beach. “Until 1890 there wasn’t much to the town itself,” she later mused. “But then came the railroads & buildings sprang up like mushrooms after a summer rain.”

Julia thrived in her wild surroundings. She raced her mustang along the shore against Indian friends & “I generally won, too.” She wandered the forests with an eye towards a meal. “I never came home without something,” she said. “When I was eleven years old, I commenced to shoot a gun – mine was the first breach-loading, double-barreled shotgun on the island.”

Relative Erwin Knapp remembers that Julia lived away from the farm at one point but had to return to “take care of the g-damn cows.” She’d sometimes let the cattle feed along the road, herding them home later with her Model A pickup. “You could tell she herded cows with it because of the dents in the fenders & holes in the radiator.”

After her parents died, Julia carried on at the farm alone. To the end she used kerosene lamps, fetched wood for the stoves & drew water from a well. The cows were gone but she still raised chickens & rose at 6:00 AM to attend to chores.

Sadly, in later years, young people regularly drove onto her property & tormented the elderly woman. One night she finally aimed her 30-30 carbine at a car & wounded two men. They sped to the hospital & Julia was taken to jail. In a newspaper report, neighbors spoke in her favor & authorities admonished the troublemakers.

It’s unknown if formal charges were pressed, but two years later Julia was hoping to sell off a bit of the farm & blow down to Oregon in that big green convertible. Maybe she did it, or maybe she settled for the memory of racing a mustang along a wild Fidalgo shore.
In Anacortes, Mae-Louise sticks out like a laclily gloved thumb. “I’m kind of an attraction,” she admits, basking in the stares & smiles. “People expect to see me different.”

She rarely disappoints. Elegant in vintage gowns crowned by beautifully trimmed hats, Mae-Louise is a vision from another time.

Her home serves as a never-ending closet. Inside are close to five hundred hats, one of which, handmade by Dopps, measures seven feet around the brim. Antique gowns, jackets, gloves, purses, uniforms, shoes, wedding dresses, petticoats, French lingerie & more fill every inch of her two-story house. There’s hardly space to cook & the bathroom door won’t shut.

A child of the Depression, Mae-Louise grew up in Massachusetts & always made her own wardrobe, fashioning nightgowns & dresses from muslin grain sacks. Today, her passion for clothes spurs hours of work restoring dresses, mending lace, beading jackets & re-stringing old necklaces. At a time of life when she might be content to rest & reflect, Mae-Louise insists “I’m not going to sit in a chair & look at the view.”

Instead, she patches clothes, haunts thrift shops & antique stores, volunteers at the Lincoln Theater & delights in loaning out her collection free of charge for local productions. “I like to see people use my things. It’s my pleasure.”

Over two hundred of her outfits were used by the Northwest Children’s Theater to costume “Fiddler on the Roof.” The theater also borrowed her butter churn & feather beds.

Mae-Louise has squirreled away not only clothes & jewelry but a galaxy of antiques, including irons, cookbooks, magazines, sheet music, dishes, four organs & a six-foot-high Nickelodeon.

Husband Warren notes that when he was in the Navy the couple lived in Japan for three years & his wife “practically bought out the country.” Mae-Louise came home with a hundred kimonos, many of which were used to costume the local cast of “The Mikado.”

Although in the spotlight now everywhere she goes, Mae-Louise has never been on stage herself, noting that “I was a little bit on the shy side, believe it or not.” It is a stretch to imagine shyness in a woman who won’t hesitate to ask a stranger how high her heels are or who’ll buttonhole passersby to ask where they come from.
ighting to be myself comes as second nature,” says Maria Petrish. “There were always people who thought I ought to be less assertive.” Luckily, this strong-willed woman didn’t listen.

She grew up a “bit of a tomboy,” fished, drove a tractor, worked 18-hour days in the cannery & “beat the holy crap” out of a boy who taunted her because of her ethnic background.

As a small child, Maria fled Yugoslavia with her family when the Communists seized power. After living as refugees for several years, they finally joined relatives in Anacortes in 1949.

She learned all the skills needed to run a home & today loves to cook, quilt & make jam. But back then she chafed at the work. “If you weren’t reading or working in the garden, you were embroidering or darning or crocheting or knitting & you’d look longingly at those American brats out there playing in the trees, playing baseball…I was always in trouble because I really, really loved to play.”

She spoke no English when she arrived but caught on quickly enough to help her parents with their citizenship exam. What she learned made her passionate about her adopted country. “To this day, I keep a copy of the Constitution at home.”

Maria wanted to enter the Diplomatic Corps & completed a year of college toward that goal. Then marriage to Nick intervened & she took on the traditional roles of wife & mother.

After a while she felt she was “copping out” on being herself. She began the Croatian Club in 1972 to keep her heritage alive & today, nearly 14,000 pieces of costumes for the Vela Luka dance troupe fill her basement. She does all the upkeep on the costumes. “It keeps you off the streets, man!”

A self-described “wild-eyed Democrat,” she ran for state representative in 1974 & doorbelled almost every neighborhood in her district. She lost by a mere 125 votes but loved the challenge & the pressure. Later, she manned Congressman Lloyd Meeds’ Mt. Vernon office.

She also worked for Dr. Jack Papritz, who had the inspiration for an outdoors arts festival in Anacortes. “We didn’t know what we couldn’t do & the rest is history,” says Maria, who is devoted to the arts.

She likes to wear black so she doesn’t have to fuss with making things match. “In the old country, widows would wear black. My parents would ask me, why are you wearing black? Because I like it! Don’t you want to be colorful? I am!”

Agreed.
Frank V. Hogan 1838-1927
FIRST MAYOR OF ANACORTES

Hogan became the first mayor of Anacortes in 1887. He was born in Texas in 1838 and moved to Anacortes in 1882. Hogan was a well-respected leader in the community and played a significant role in the growth and development of Anacortes. He was known for his honesty and integrity, which earned him the respect of his fellow Anacortians. Hogan served as mayor for several years and was instrumental in the establishment of the first public school in Anacortes.

Hogan was also involved in the local lumber industry and played a role in the development of the town's economy. He was a strong advocate for the city's future and worked tirelessly to ensure its success. His legacy continues to be remembered in Anacortes, where his contributions to the community are still celebrated today.
Councilmen probably avoided tangling with the first Mayor of Anacortes. Hogan was tough.

He was born in Bastrop, Texas, seven years before the state joined the Union. At age 20, he became a Texas Ranger, helping safeguard the area for settlers.

Hogan later fought in the Confederate Army, was wounded & helped capture the man-of-war Winslow, a daring event that caught the world’s attention. “An enemy gunboat was lying off Galveston & by night we loaded several flatboats with bales of cotton, concealing the troops behind them,” he recalled. “The ship’s captain did not know what to make of it until we ran alongside & sprang on board.”

After the war, still hot for a fight, Hogan headed to Mexico to serve with Emperor Maximilian but was persuaded it was a lost cause & turned back. Home for a time, he then left Texas for California & made his way to Anacortes in 1888.

Here he invested in land & with a partner established “Hogan & Hagan,” a firm that handled property for the Oregon Improvement Company. Hogan was elected Anacortes’ first mayor when the town incorporated in 1891 & served another two terms in 1904 & 1915. He proved a strong promoter of the town but was averse to publicity about himself, sharing his story only under the condition it be published after his death.

But the Mayor wasn’t shy when it came to cleaning up the town’s coarser elements. A certain “Peg-Leg Loomis” was one of the worst. When a group of citizens tried to run him out of town, Loomis armed & barricaded himself in a shack near Second Street, threatening to shoot the first man who came near.

The townspeople appealed to the former Texas Ranger, who boldly approached the shack & called out to Loomis that it was “his move.” According to one account, Hogan “described his attributes forcefully & full-voiced & told him to get – instantly. If he left within an hour, no one would harm him, but if he tarried they would come get him & hang him.” Loomis left.

After the bottom dropped out of Anacortes’ boom, Hogan resumed his adventurous ways & headed up to Alaska & the Yukon, then eventually wandered back to Anacortes.

He married twice & had four daughters. Near the end of his 89 years, the old war hero took pride in outliving four doctors who told him he was on the brink of death, noting with satisfaction that “I’ve attended the funerals of every blankety-blank one.”
Of the words “Junk King” call to mind a tattered fellow seated on top of a trash heap, that’s the wrong picture of Anacortes’ own junk king.

Efthemos “Mike” Demopoulos was such a stickler for cleanliness, recalls daughter Billie McKee, that “every time you came into the house you had to wash your hands before touching anything.”

Born into a hardscrabble life where the family meal was often nothing more than onion sandwiches, Demopoulos left Greece for America in 1906. He changed his name to “Mike,” headed to a cousin’s place in Portland & learned English on various jobs.

In 1913, he came to Anacortes & borrowed $14 to start what became his signature business. Ignoring the taunts of peers yelling “Junky,” he pushed a wheelbarrow to collect industrial scrap, chains, old saw blades – anything he could resell.

Toil was second nature to a man who until age 90 showed up for work at six every morning. As the junk business grew, Demopoulos traded in his wheelbarrow for a horse & wagon & later moved up to a Mack truck marked “Anacortes Junk Company.” In 1916, he moved into a small place behind the Marine Supply & Hardware building he later purchased.

Demopoulos bought property “every time he made a quarter extra,” but never forgot to give back. His generosity is legendary. Much of his land he eventually gave to Anacortes because “the town helped me & I’m helping it.” He donated property for the plywood mill, the schools, & in 1956, when officials were set to make him an offer, he donated ten square city blocks of waterfront land to create the Cap Sante Boat Haven.

One man who was just scraping by recalls going to Mike’s store & telling him he sure would like a stove. Mike replied, “Well, why don’t you have it?” The fellow said, “I’ll take it if you don’t send me a bill!” He never got a bill.

Demopoulos married Eleni in 1921 & fathered three children. As strict with himself as he was with his family, the patriarch took just one cigar every Sunday & only one swallow of brandy before dinner.

He instilled in his children pride in being Greek, a responsibility to give back & the value of hard work. Once he urged a fellow to work harder or “you’re going to end up a garbage man!”

Perhaps it was only okay to start out that way.
When Minnie Burdon retired as Seattle General’s chief of staff a newspaper announced: “Woman Doctor Retires.” No paper today would run such a headline, but back in Burdon’s time, woman doctors were as rare as hen’s teeth.

That’s an apt cliché in this case, since it was chickens who helped Burdon become a doctor. Or so the story goes.

Burdon’s parents insisted medicine was no career for a female. But that was before they left Minnie & her siblings alone for a day at their March’s Point farm. The children fed pork rinds to the chickens, which caused several to keel over with plugged craws. Minnie slit their throats, extracted the rinds, sewed them back up, saved the flock & so dissolved at least her father’s objections to her career choice.

In 1909, Burdon graduated from the University of Oregon Medical School. After completing her internship, she returned to Anacortes to practice & then went into the army during WW I to serve as a surgeon anesthetist.

One relative remembers that when Burdon first began her practice, a man entered her office & tried to intimidate her by exposing himself. After a glance she coolly noted “Well, there’s nothing out of the ordinary but that will be five dollars.”

Burdon completed a residency in gynecology at the Mayo Clinic & then returned to Anacortes to practice for several years & care for her parents.

After leaving Anacortes, she practiced at Seattle General, retiring in 1950 after a forty-year career that included volunteering her services to a home for unwed mothers.

Burdon never married, but may have been engaged at one time to a man who died before they could wed. Childless herself, she helped raise & educate her sister’s children.

Great-nieces Nancy Mathews & Joan Granville remember visits from their formidable-looking aunt, who arrived in sensible heels & a back brace that gave her a poker-straight stance. Aunt Minnie would “position her cosmetics very precisely on the dresser & fastidiously consign her folded garments to the drawers” before scooping the girls into her lap.

Another descendant recalls taking the doctor to visit friends on Sinclair Island. While out in a 14-foot open boat, wind billowing her skirts, an orca pod surfaced nearby. The skipper suggested a hasty retreat but to his surprise Burdon urged, “Can’t we get closer?”

Plugged craws, feisty patients, orca pods…there obviously wasn’t much that fazed Dr. Minnie Burdon.
Paul Luvera 1898-1990
Grocer, Senator, Totem Pole Carver

His path careened from Anacortes grocer to state senator to totem pole carver. Bizarre? Not for a man who once sent a case of canned salmon to Queen Elizabeth, dashed off a stern letter to Joseph Stalin & ran down Commercial Avenue in a nightgown to promote his town.

Paul Luvera was an Italian immigrant who burst upon Anacortes in 1918. Four years later he had his own grocery. Townsfolk gave the venture six months, but with family support, longer hours than his competitors (and midnight supply drops to island bootleggers), Luvera's Market lasted 35 years.

His love for Anacortes embraced both the serious & the silly. While spearheading efforts to bring Anacortes Veneer, Fisherman's Pack & a swimming pool to town, he settled a bet with a public bath & promoted the town with a “Cat Putter-Outer” contest.

Luvera became a state senator by vowing to improve the road into Anacortes, which regularly washed out. Businessmen pushed for a route over the water, but engineers warned shoreline foundation work would increase the cost & postpone the project. Alternately, a highway could be built into the hillside for less expense, doable now. Facing down boos & accusations of “traitor,” Luvera chose the second option.

In 1958, the Highway 20 spur was completed to much acclaim six months after Luvera lost his re-election bid. He wrote: “I had the pleasure of being true to my convictions even when I was cussed & discussed by the whole community.”

Anacortes had more opportunity to discuss Luvera after he left the Senate. He sold the grocery & to please wife Mary, who longed for a totem pole, he embarked on a new thirty-year path.

After years honing his craft, the “Italian Indian” wrote How to Carve Totem Poles. Galled by the “smart-aleck Eastern publishers” who turned it down, he paid to print 5000 books & sent copies to 250 newspapers & magazines.

Not one would review it. “I looked at all those boxes of books & I figured I had to use my brain.” Deciding “people in Chicago don't like New York,” he finally hit a bulls-eye with Chicago columnist Mike Royko. Once Royko wrote about Luvera's struggle, the orders flooded in.

A quote in Luvera's den sums up the spirit of this colorful character: “The Pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. The Optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

Paul Luvera not only saw his opportunities, he seized & made the most of them.
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Lawrence Kelly ~1830-1912

“KING OF THE SMUGGLERS”

He was the father of nine & a member of the Sinclair Island school board who once wrote “never in my life have I wronged my fellow men.” But mothers had only to bring up his name to terrify their children into good behavior.

That name was “Smuggler Kelly,” synonymous for 45 years with a scruffy seadog who ran opium & Chinese laborers from Canada into Washington.

Information is sketchy, but Kelly was born sometime in the 1830s, most likely in Ireland. He left a ship that put in at New Orleans during the Civil War to join in the fight for the South. With Lee’s surrender in 1865 Kelly headed west, vowing to “never earn an honest living under the stars & stripes!”

At this he excelled. Kelly arrived in Puget Sound aboard the Young America & quickly made good on his promise by smuggling silks into Washington.

Over the years, Kelly smuggled whatever was profitable, although his main contraband was unstamped opium. He worked alone, slicing through island waters on the tallow-greased hulls of his sailboats the Alert & the Katy Thomas. Kelly eventually proved so adept at eluding officers through his cunning & familiarity with local waters that he was crowned “King of the Smugglers.”

His daring at sea was described by a man who marveled as Kelly sailed heeled over & rail awash through a hurricane. The smuggler “came into the bay as unconcerned as if he had been out for a pleasant day’s sail. Believe me, Kelly was a cool one, & he knew his sails.”

Nonetheless, Kelly was caught numerous times & served several jail terms. Confronted once by a customs agent on a train, he bolted to the platform, jumped & was picked up unconscious. Doctored & served roast duck at Sumas Immigration, he reported “I never was treated better in my life.”

In 1878, Kelly married Lizzie Cootes (often referred to as “Kotz”) & built a cabin on the southwest tip of Guemes (Kelly’s Point). Eventually, his smuggling payoffs purchased a 360-acre homestead on Sinclair Island.

As far as we know, Kelly never apologized for smuggling but noted “I was an honest smuggler if there ever was one.” In 1912, after his last lock-up, the Smuggler King was broke, landless & no longer married to Lizzie. He supposedly moved to Louisiana where he lived out his last days in a Confederate Soldier’s Home.
Tol Stola ~ 1828-1919

CAROLINE “GRANDMA” KAVANAUGH

She was an Indian princess who married the nephew of the president of the Confederacy & later was the first sheriff of Whatcom County.

Accounts vary as to when she was born, what tribe she belonged to & when she arrived on Fidalgo.

Tol Stola may have been the granddaughter of a Vancouver Island chief who came to Fidalgo in 1844 to conquer the Swinomish. The Swinomish tribe.

Or...she was born on Fidalgo, descended from a line of Swinomish chief. Her mother died & her father placed Tol Stola with relatives or friends on Bellingham Bay. A white woman eventually took the girl into her home & gave her a Catholic upbringing. It was there she met Lieutenant Samuel Davis, nephew of Jefferson Davis.

Renowned for her beauty, grace & smarts, Tol Stola also played a practical joke. One account notes that she would run from Davis when he tried to kiss her & swim to an island half a mile away, leaving him to beg her return.

That spirit continued to shine over the years. Into old age, Tol Stola regularly walked six miles to the Catholic Church on the Swinomish Reservation. One day she met a grandson on his motorcycle & shocked him when “without the least hesitation, she climbed up on the back seat & vowed great enjoyment, rode the white man’s gas pony to her home.”

After Davis & Tol Stola married, they lived at Port Bellingham & had a son, Samuel (killed years later in a steamboat explosion). With the start of the Civil War, Davis left home to enlist.

He never returned. Tol Stola eventually married Sheriff James Kavanaugh, who called her “Caroline,” & they established a farm at March Point in 1865.

Kavanaugh died around 1885 & Tol Stola continued on at the homestead. As the aged, the tiny woman with hair that matched almost to the ground strongly influenced her tribe. One time, while she was ill in bed, an old friend died & was buried without Tol Stola’s knowledge. The next day she rode home to re결定 & ordered the body exhumed for a second funeral service.

In a 1913 interview, Tol Stola, also known then as “Grandma Kavanaugh,” recalled the various paths she’d taken, from wild Indian girl to a Lieutenant’s pampered wife to hard-working farm wife.

“Yet my life a busy state of affairs,” she marveled.

Local Lore

Maiden of Deception Pass

A lovely Samish maiden named Ko-la-she-abot was gathering shell food on the beach near Deception Pass.

A British girl fell into the water & she reached into the water to retrieve it. Again it dipped from her grasp & she would further & further into the water until eventually her hand was gripped by a sea god known with her beauty.

One day he emerged from the water & asked Ko-la-she-abot’s father for her hand in marriage. When Ko-la-she-abot refused, she was made into a sea spirit, watching over the Samish people. Her scalp hair floating on the waves of Deception Pass.

To see her people from starvation, Ko-la-she-abot’s father asked Ko-la-she-abot’s daughter marry the sea spirit, on condition that once a year she would return home for a visit.

Ko-la-she-abot walked into the sea & the salmon & shell fish returned to find her people. She visited her tribe until they came a time when the no-longer wished to be gone from the sea.

Ko-la-she-abot herself became a sea spirit, watching over the Samish people, her scalp hair floating on the waves of Deception Pass.
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Tol Stola may have been the granddaughter of a Vancouver Island chieftain who came to Fidalgo in 1844 to conquer the Swinomish. The invading braves were killed, the battle lost & little Tol Stola was taken into the Swinomish tribe.

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Renowned for her beauty, grace & smarts, Tol Stola also had a playful streak. One account notes that she would run from Davis when he tried to kiss her & swim to an island half a mile away, leaving him to beg her return.

That spirit continued to shine over the years. Into old age Tol Stola regularly walked six miles to the Catholic Church on the Swinomish Reservation. One day she met a grandson on his motorcycle & shocked him when “without the least hesitation, she climbed up on the back seat & with seeming great enjoyment, rode the white man’s gas pony to her home.”

After Davis & Tol Stola married, they lived at Fort Bellingham & had a son, Samuel (killed years later in a steamboat explosion). With the start of the Civil War, Davis left home to enlist.

He never returned. Tol Stola eventually married Sheriff James Kavanaugh, who called her “Caroline,” & they established a farm at March’s Point in 1865.

Kavanaugh died around 1885 & Tol Stola continued on at the homestead. As she aged, the tiny woman with hair that reached almost to the ground strongly influenced her tribe. One time, while she was ill in bed, an old friend died & was buried without Tol Stola’s knowledge. The next day she rode a horse to the reservation & ordered the body exhumed for a second funeral service.

In a 1913 interview, Tol Stola, also known then as “Grandma Kavanaugh,” recalled the various paths she’d taken, from wild Indian girl to a Lieutenant’s pampered wife to hard-working farm wife.

“Isn’t life a funny state of affairs?” she marveled.
Valentine Funk 1863-1956

Valentine Funk had a hand in just about everything in the early days of Anacortes. He began as a construction worker & eventually opened a bakery, grocery, hardware store & restaurant. He had interests in a cannery, packing plant, bank, glass company & mining venture. He also owned & operated the New Wilson Hotel.

Funk worked as a miner in Snohomish, then came to Anacortes in 1889 where he found work as a contractor's assistant. He soon built a bakery, which he later turned into a grocery store. The Funks put their backs into the store – literally. Willing to fill fishermen's orders at any hour, they more than once pulled a full-sized wagon down to the waterfront. "The horse was too tired sometimes to get him to stir," said Funk. "Those were the days when you took better care of your animals than you did of yourself."

Funk stuck out the rough times in Anacortes, when the boom busted & the population plummeted from several thousand to 500 or less. "It took a lot of foresight & backbone to stick by the town when everything seemed to be going wrong," he reflected.

But stick by it he did, only to find himself ignored in a 1930 edition of the Anacortes American that ran a double-page spread honoring long-time local businessmen.

The snub stung. Funk, who was 67 at the time, posted a large, furious ad in the newspaper. "Why can't I be listed in this double page collection of antiquarians?" he growled, citing his many business ventures. "WHY PICK ON ME & leave me out? I'm sore!"

Grandson Wallie Funk thinks the omission may have had to do with anti-German feeling at the time. Whatever the reason, the paper offered no apologies in print.

Forward to 1950, when the announcement came that Shell had chosen Anacortes as its new refinery site. Funk declared it "one of the greatest days in Fidalgo Island history" & marked the occasion by hanging a flag in front of the New Wilson.

Six years later he died, a robust pioneer who insisted his "only concession" to age was his false teeth.
Captain Bill Kasch, one of the first to make regular ferryboat runs in the islands, referred to himself as a “Jonah” because of the number of ships he’d sailed on that had sunk.

No one else would have called the congenial skipper a curse. Instead, “Captain Bill” endeared himself to island-bound folks not only by providing freight & passenger service but by his willingness to do more. He’d purchase a fry pan for a homemaker, deliver dentures in need of repair or take a bucket of clams in lieu of fare.

The captain also kept an eye out for red flags. The distress signals would draw him in to anchor & carry off the sick or injured.

Born in Iowa, Kasch came to Anacortes in 1890 & ten years later bought the Molly K to haul freight to Friday Harbor. In 1904, he bought the Anglo Saxon & started passenger runs between Anacortes & the San Juans.

Kasch took the Anglo Saxon to Alaska where it was wrecked by a huge breaker. He returned home, bought the Yale & added Bellingham to the island run. That upped business so much he bought the bigger Yankee Doodle in 1909.

Although no stranger to adversity (he lost a nine-year-old son to drowning, two fingers in an accident & then there were those shipwrecks), Kasch was known for his constant singing & whistling. Neighbors “needed no alarm clocks for when they heard the familiar whistling, they knew it was right around 6:00 AM.”

During WWI, Kasch left his Inter-Island Navigation Company in a partner’s care & signed on to a steamship that sank off France. He later crewed on the S. S. Blackford which hit a tropical cyclone & was lost off lower California in 1918. The crew spent nearly two weeks in a deserted bay subsisting on turtle steaks.

Stormy weather rarely deterred Kasch from his island runs.

Yankee Doodle & heard Kasch bellow, “All aboard for the San Juan Archipelago, if you don’t care where the h--- you go!”

Rough seas washed over the boat & flooded the engine. The anxious passenger heard the captain pounding away when “Suddenly the engine started & the door swung open. Captain Kasch, covered with grease & oil, came through singing ‘Nearer My God to Thee.’”

The captain, his health compromised by the Blackford shipwreck, died at age 52. But memories of the “singing skipper” live on.
Local Lore

Sea Monster of Deception Pass

In 1950, a “sea monster” washed ashore on the Whidbey side of the west entrance to Deception Pass. According to one account, the animal was a snakelike creature eight to nine feet long with a tuft of stiff black hair growing from the top of its head. The Associated Press ran the story, which attracted many gawkers who cut away parts of the animal for souvenirs.

It’s possible the Deception Pass serpent was the legendary Cadborosaurus, whose name is derived from Cadboro Bay, in Victoria, B.C. & “sauros” meaning lizard or reptile. “Caddy” is reputed to live along the Pacific Coast, with more than 300 reported sightings over the past 200 years.

Smuggler’s Secret Signal System

Ben Ure was a Scotsman who homesteaded on an island just inside Deception Pass. He set up a saloon on the island that catered to loggers, tugboat men, & smugglers.

Ure’s Indian wife often camped on nearby Strawberry Island, which commands a good view out through the pass. It’s said she kept a fire going, & when customs agents were nosing around Ure’s island, she would sit in front of the fire to alert her husband & other smugglers planning to enter the pass. When it was safe for the smugglers’ boats to slip through, she would leave the fire unblocked.

Local Lore

First Trip Is Last Trip

The Fidalgo City & Anacortes Electric Railroad was supposed to run from the north end of Fidalgo Island to Fidalgo City (now Dewey). At 3 PM on a March day in 1891, it was “all aboard!” for dignitaries & guests.

The trolley moved from the Bowman dock at the foot of Q Avenue, up to M Avenue, back down along Q & out to Weaverling Spit, across Fidalgo Bay & south to Fidalgo City. Power began to drop as the car continued south until it was “just able to crawl & jerk to the end of the line.”

On the trip back to town, the trolley failed again & passengers had to get out & push. They finally made it home to deserted streets at 10 PM, winding up the only trip the trolley ever made to Fidalgo City.
In 1934, Paul Luvera was sure he would have a son to follow his two daughters. Rex Stevenson, manager of the Empire Theater across from Luvera’s grocery, thought otherwise, & bet Luvera it would be another girl.

The two agreed the loser would take a bath on a Saturday afternoon in front of the Empire. Said loser would have to supply the tub & a large flatbed truck to elevate it so the bath could be easily viewed by the crowd.

The Anacortes Daily Mercury wrote a front-page story on the bet to divert a citizenry in the midst of the Depression.

The next story ran after the birth & read: “Rex Stevenson Lost. Paul Jr. Arrived! Rex will take a public bath this Saturday at 1 PM in front of the Empire Theater to pay his bet. The public is invited.”

Crowds lined both sides of Commercial Ave. & 7th Street. Stevenson did a slow-motion strip-tease down to a “mini-size” bathing suit, then got in the tub, prominently displayed on the flatbed, & soaped up. Later, according to Luvera, “the crowd dispersed in a happy mood to do their shopping. It was a good show.”

By 1922, Anacortes had acquired several parcels of Washington Park but one of its most loved areas – the stretch from Sunset Beach to Green Point – was still in private hands & up for sale.

The city demurred at the $2500 asking price & consequently a developer put $100 on a purchase option. The Anacortes Women’s Club, rolling pins at the ready, charged forth to raise $1000 for the land if the city would kick in the balance.

The Anacortes American reported that purchasers were decorated with the “order of the lemon,” & “no man was safe without this insignia.”

The women baked hundreds of lemon pies (23¢/slice; $1/pie) & accomplished their goal with a healthy helping of dough & determination.
Local Lore

Maiden of Deception Pass

A lovely Samish maiden named Ko-kwal-alwoot was gathering food on the beach near Deception Pass. A shellfish slipped from her hand & she reached into the water to retrieve it. Again it slipped from her grasp & she waded further & further into the water until eventually her hand was gripped by a sea god smitten with her beauty.

One day he emerged from the water & asked Ko-kwal-alwoot’s father for her hand in marriage. When her father refused, seafood became scarce.

To save his people from starvation, Ko-kwal-alwoot’s father at last agreed to let his daughter marry the sea spirit, on condition that once a year she would return home for a visit.

Ko-kwal-alwoot walked into the sea & the salmon & shellfish returned to feed her people. She visited her tribe until there came a time when she no longer wished to be gone from the sea.

Ko-kwal-alwoot herself became a sea spirit, watching over the Samish people, her kelplike hair floating on the waters of Deception Pass.

How the Beaver Came to Pass Lake

A Samish “teaching tale” tells how the beavers, or “Night People,” that lived at Fidalgo’s Pass Lake were ancestors of the Samish Indians.

Once human, they were turned into beavers by The Changer when he discovered them fighting, stealing & quarreling among themselves. He told the unruly people, “You are no longer human, so I will condemn you to what you want to be.”

The Changer then took away their voices & gave them large flat tails. “Your lives are being preserved, but not for your own kind,” said The Changer.

“Prepare, grow & multiply, for you will serve another people. You are no longer human. From now on, you will be the Night People. Because of your mischief, you have been changed into what you want to be. You are the beaver.”
As Wallie Funk tells it, “Sam Crandall had a mean, mean goat.” Out of patience with it, he stuck the goat in his rowboat & turned it loose on the island in the middle of Lake Campbell. The goat quickly assumed possession & began to terrorize visitors.

One fine day the Funk family rowed over for a picnic, selected their spot & laid out the checkered tablecloth. “All of a sudden, little rocks began rolling down. We looked up & here was this goat coming down the side of the island right at us.

“We didn’t even pick up the picnic lunch. We were in our rowboat & going. (The goat) came right down to the edge. Of course he won the day. One more family, one more group.”

Rumor has it that one winter the lake froze over & the goat clomped home on its own.

On April 14, 1924, four men in a stolen Buick from Bellingham robbed Citizen’s Bank at the southeast corner of 7th Street & Commercial Ave., making off with $18,000. They jumped in the getaway car & fired shots into the air, one of which went through a window of the Wilson Hotel. Wallie Funk Sr. ran out of the building, jumped on the running board of the pursuing car & the chase was on.

Someone called down to the lumber mill at 35th Street & told them to drag a log across the road. But before that could happen, the car tore by & off down Fidalgo Bay Road.

Out near the golf course the robbers ran a farm truck off the road, then ditched their car a little further down where a boat was waiting.

The scoundrels were never caught.
Think your family’s colorful? Check out the Lowmans.

Betty, Bill & honorary family member Bobo have their own panels, & rightfully so. But more riches can be mined from a family history that includes a submarine side-trip to Anacortes & a showdown with John Wayne.

Betty & Bill’s great grand-dad Jacob came to Anacortes in 1892 & eventually became a judge & our eighth mayor. After his death, wife Nancy lived where a bank had been located in the Anacortes Hotel. She stored her canned goods in the bank’s vault & raised eyebrows driving a 1918 Cadillac.

Their son Will was a farm boy with little education who became a Washington State Legislator, wrote a Fisheries Treaty & started the White Crest Canning Company here in 1896. He once became so incensed with a son’s teacher that he chased him through the streets of Anacortes (the teacher outran him). Wife Beatrice grew geraniums “by the hundreds” & to insure her maiden name lived on, gave each of her seven children the middle name of Baer.

The stonework of Betty & Bill’s father Ray Lowman forms rock walls, foundations & fireplaces throughout Anacortes. A man of great physical strength, Ray also had a powerful voice that not only graced choirs, weddings & funerals but cursed in blazing paragraphs.

One family story describes how Ray was at the helm of son Bill’s converted minesweeper, the Vindicator, & refused to give way to another minesweeper, the Blue Goose. Bill recognized the boat & said “Better get out of his way. That’s John Wayne.” Ray replied, “Who’s John Wayne?”

Ray’s wife Jean mothered a baby gorilla & gave music lessons to Anacortes children for over 70 years. An admirer of King Arthur, she taught her five children the oath of the Knights of the Round Table instead of evening prayers, then worried that she’d raised heathens.

Two of her sons went on to distinguish themselves in battle. During WWII, Jack served on Liberty ships that were used as “bait” to lure U-boats. Bob became a naval commander who in 1955 diverted his submarine to Anacortes & tied up at the port dock. He invited townspeople aboard & even had his crew project a movie onto a port building for a large & grateful crowd.

In 1929, the Ray Lowman family gave up their spacious home for a year to serve as a temporary hospital after the city’s hospital burned down. Blessed with abundant talent, drive & yes, color, the Lowmans also gave generously of themselves to a town who’ll be telling their tales for years.
That love for machines shows today in the antique engines & cars that sparkle & chug with new life under his care. His amazing collection fills several buildings & includes a 1914 Model T roadster, an Atlas Imperial engine & machines that grind rocks, pump water & spray steam to thaw culverts.

What's more, he can tell you the history behind each. His own past is tied to the 1917 Anacortes Junk Co. truck he drove for Mike Demopoulos in 1950 & spent years resurrecting. Today, he & wife Dorothy turn heads when they take the truck out for its annual spin.

But restoration has always been just a hobby for Muthland, who fished commercially until he was 85. He's also a fishing-rights activist who has been told he "comes on too strong," but who will admit he's "done a lot of good for the fishermen." Dorothy notes that he still follows the fishing news & "jumps up & down, going 'what's the matter with those people'!"

A neighbor once threw a "what's the matter with you?" at Muthland when he brought home a Model T tractor, but he shrugged it off. For him, "I just think saving some of these things is really important."
Betty Lowman Carey 1914–

One of a Kind!

Betty Lowman Carey was born in 1914. She grew up in the small town of Anchor Point, Alaska. As a young girl, she showed an interest in photography and spent hours capturing images of the town's life. Betty's father, Ray, was a local fisherman and photographer, and he taught her the craft.

Betty's love for photography led her to become a renowned photographer known for her images of the Alaskan wilderness. Her work was featured in various magazines and newspapers, capturing the beauty of the region.

Betty Lowman Carey passed away in 1995, leaving behind a legacy of stunning photographs that continue to inspire and captivate viewers.
Woops!

Until very recently, we believed this to be “Bubbles” Finley. Unfortunately, it turned out to be someone else wearing the same outfit once worn by the real Bubbles.

Sorry about the mistake!

If you can shed any light on who this actually is, please let the museum staff know.