

BLHS Newsletter

Spring 2021

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Vice President	Lloyd Watkinson
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A Letter from Our President

Greetings friends!

What a year it has been. It was April 18th, 2020 when we cancelled our spring quarterly meeting in compliance with “stay at home” orders due to the pandemic. Who knew that a years’ worth of cancellations and postponements would ensue? With great disappointment we postponed our 2020 exhibit amid hopes of “next year”! “Next year” has arrived and unfortunately circumstances have not changed enough to have an exhibit this year, August 2022 is more realistic. None of us are getting any younger and these reunions every two years are an important and wonderful way to reconnect. We miss you!

In the past year we have lost three important local historians: Madlyn Yarcho, Ida Uitto Jensen, and Herbert Drummond Jr. In this newsletter you can read a little about their contributions to our community and historic record.

The BLHS board has continued to communicate as we progressively cancelled meetings and exhibits. Melba Hall has kept our legal filings and annual reports up to date. Pattie Pleas is working on our 2022 calendar and we continue to respond to the occasional phone call or letter. Most of us have received our shots and are feeling more comfortable about meeting. We are keeping our fingers crossed that our quarterly meetings can resume in October.

Please be safe and keep love in your heart until we can meet again!

Jim Farmer, President BLHS

REMEMBERING....

The BLHS loses two wonderful and dedicated members on the same day this past summer, June 20, 2020. They are missed!



Madlyn Yarcho (1930-2020) was considered a newcomer to Big Lake by some. In May of 1951, she and her husband bought a working chicken farm that was referred to

as “the old Wirta place”, located on the hill at the northwest end of the lake. After Al passed away, alongside her friend, Melba Hall, she would spend days talking to “the old timers”, going through newspaper archives and gathering photographs from the early days of the valley. These collections, along with collections from other families, became the primary source for the bi-annual Big Lake Historical Exhibit. Madlyn was a member of the BLHS Board since its inception in 2005 and had served as President and Vice President.



Ida Jensen (1936-2020) was born in the Finn Settlement to John and Olga Uitto, early settlers to the settlement. Ida was a lifelong resident of Skagit County and very proud to say she'd lived here her whole life. She was very proud of her family and her Finnish roots. She and her

sister Julia actively researched the family genealogy, and both were contributing authors to the book, Images of America—Big Lake Valley. Ida was actively involved in the BLHS, proudly sharing the history of the Finn Settlement at the society's biennial exhibits and serving on the board as both Vice President and Secretary.

What is Your Story?

We want to hear your stories—Pattie Hanstad Pleas shares what it was like to grow up at Big Lake in the 40s and 50s on the 2nd page. We want you to tell your story—whatever decade it was or is—maybe it is just an anecdotal event or activity or maybe it is biographical. In the next issue Peggy Dahl and Marsha Bonay share their father, Roy Wirta's story of growing up here in the 20s and 30s. We will accept a paragraph or multiple paragraphs, what is most important is—we would love to hear from you! Send your story to our email: biglakehistoricalsociety@gmail.com or the address located on the back of the newsletter. Thank you.

Trudi Yarcho Davis

REMEMBERING cont'd...

Herbert W. Drummond, Jr. (1924-2020)—Was born to Herbert & Geraldine Drummond, Sr. at Big Lake Hospital and grew up on the Westside of Big Lake. He was an active and staunch supporter of the BLHS, often contributing anecdotes and photos of early life at Big Lake.

Roy William Wirta (1921-2020)—He was born Easter Sunday, March 27, 1921 on the family farm above Big Lake. Roy was the only child of John and Hilma Wirta. Roy attended school at Big Lake and Sedro-Woolley High School. He left the area as an adult but often returned to visit his early home known as the “Wirta Place” and attend the BLHS Biennial Exhibit. He was a life-time member of the BLHS.

OUR STORIES



The cabin was on the waterfront lot of the Anderson property and the two on the innertube are Pattie Hanstad and Carol Crum. (A typical summer day in the 40s)

Growing Up in Big Lake in the 40s and 50s --Pattie's Story--

In 1943 my parents bought a house with 3 lots on the east side of Big Lake from a Mrs. Hadley. The house is currently owned by the Brandt family. The lots were: (1) Waterfront (2) On the east side of the road (3) Back lot, east side of the alley, behind the house, and the house was completely furnished. The price: \$2,500. It was said that many questioned "What does Mrs. Hadley think she is doing? Selling all of Big Lake?"

Several early ALLEY FRIENDS were: Jackie Anderson, Carol Crum, Larry Arnold, Connie Parks. Jackie was 9 months old, and I was a year and a half old when we were first introduced. Our friendship is still strong to this day lasting for 78 years. (due to all that good fresh air at Big Lake.)

Doctor Lloyd, his wife Agnes, and daughter Joan lived to the south of our waterfront lot. My mother had severe asthma and Doctor Lloyd was a Godsend when she had an attack. His daughter Joan was my babysitter for a few years. Their lower yard had amazing concrete fishponds and the entire property was beautifully landscaped with many rose gardens.

The first grade began with many freedoms and more friends. After getting my first bike I managed to ride it back and forth to the Grocery Store. Along the way I would see and pick up empty beer and pop bottles and place them in my bike basket, which I would then turn in at the store and get several pennies worth of candy. This procedure lasted for several years. School friends were numerous and being an only child, I relished having them.

At 8 I received my first horse, and at 10 my second. The Loyds owned a large field on the Southeast end of the Alley, which we rented as horse pasture. This pasture connected to the Crisp property and the Crum property. Many games of "Cowboys and Indians" were played in that field, around many burned out old stump piles. Life was so very good, and FUN!

Living at Big Lake was like a dream. Children everywhere of all ages always having something to do such as: Bike riding, horseback riding, swimming in the summer, sledding and ice skating in the winter and playing games until nightfall. No one had to lock their doors, and children always felt safe. I sold all-occasion cards for three years from the "Cheerful Card Company", riding my bike as far as the road would take me and felt completely safe. However, I was told to never go near a stranger. There were no strangers at Big Lake at that time. Games like flag football, baseball, hopscotch, cowboys and Indians, in addition to yard games for several players were always enjoyed by young Big Lake kids. I must admit I miss those carefree days!

At the age of 14 we moved from the lake to the Little Mountain Road, in the old Hammond house at the end of the bus line. My mother was extremely sad to move from the lake, but my father and I were thrilled to have horses, a cow, and a few pigs on twenty acres. The vote to move by the three of us was obviously 2 to 1.

It was a youngster's dream to have been raised in the Big Lake Valley. So many stories, so many memories, that we all have during our growing years. Still much like it is for children living and growing up at Big Lake today.

So enough about me, please write your memories of Big Lake and send them to the Big Lake Historical Society Newsletter. Address is published in this newsletter. Hope you are all staying safe, healthy and excited to get back to what we all considered a "normal" life.

—Patricia (Pattie) Hanstad-Pleas

Books & 2020 BLHS Calendars Are Available for Purchase

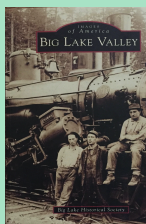
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The 2020 Souvenir Calendars are still available at the Big Lake store at \$15.00 each. The photographs in this calendar are an interesting look at the then and now of familiar places in and around the Big Lake communities. Those wishing to get your calendar by mail, may send a check made out to the BLHS in the amount of \$16.00 (which includes postage) to:

BLHS CALENDAR
C/O Pattie Hanstad Pleas
17550 Dunbar Road
Mount Vernon, WA 98273



Big Lake Valley, BLHS's book of the early history of our local communities is also available at the Big Lake store for \$21.99, or maybe purchased through the mail by sending a check made out to the BLHS in the amount of \$23.00 (includes postage) to Melba Hall, address on the left.