

ISSAQUAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PAST TIMES

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Linda Ruehle and Marilyn Batura at the November 1 chili cook-off (see page 5).

INSIDE

Fifteen Minutes	3
News Notes & Updates	4
2004 Logging Series	5
Endowment Grows	5
Winter History Night	6

Bad Ben Legg: Issaquah Outlaw

On March 29, 1920, the headline of the *Seattle Daily Times* blared, "Issaquah Ducks for Cover as Shots Fly!" The subtitle read, "Bad Ben Legg Has Aim That Matches Heart." In less than ten words, the newspaper implied that Legg was not only a bad person, but also a poor shot.

The moniker Bad Ben Legg may not have been deserved. Family members say that Legg was actually a kind, soft-spoken man, a loner who knew hardship during his life in the rough mining town that was early 20th Century Issaquah.

Like many of Issaquah's early residents, Ben Legg was the son of immigrants. His father, Robert Legg, came to the United States from England in 1869. His first wife died in childbirth sometime after 1880. Robert Legg married his first wife's cousin, Jane Fynes, in 1886. Ben Legg was born in 1889 in North Lawrence, Ohio, the second of ten children born to Robert and Jane Legg.

In 1893 the family moved to the town of Gilman, Washington (today's Issaquah). Robert Legg left behind a large lot in North Lawrence with three properties, and a manager to handle his affairs. Unfortunately, the manager took advantage of Robert Legg. He failed to pay the taxes, allowed the property to go into foreclosure, and then purchased the land himself. As a result, Robert and all his sons worked in the mines (some of them at a very young age) or mills in order to support the ever-growing family.

The family's misfortune continued when Ben's mother died in 1908. Accord-

ing to descendents, Jane Legg suffered a nervous breakdown after the birth of her youngest child and was in frail health. Her brother was to travel from England in order to collect her and take her home, but she died before he arrived.

After his wife's death, Robert Legg could not cope with childrearing. He placed two of his young daughters, Alice and Ellen, in the Sacred Heart Convent in Seattle where they remained for the next eight years. The youngest daughter, Sarah, was adopted. The other children, six boys and the oldest daughter, remained with their father.

In 1910, Ben Legg was living with his father and his younger brother George in the family home on Mill Street (today's Sunset Way). Ben was working as a sawyer, and his father was doing odd jobs.

During this era, Ben and his brothers were supporters of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a labor organization active in the Pacific Northwest between 1905 and the 1920s. The IWW, or Wobblies, campaigned to unionize lumberjacks and mill workers of the northwest. In

(continued on page 2)



Ben Legg, circa 1920. Detail from a photo of the Bellevue Hotel bar. (IHS 72.21.14.37)

Bad Ben Legg *(continued from page 1)*

addition to the marks their logging boots left on the floor of the house on Mill Street, one or more of the Legg boys inscribed the initials IWW on the chimney in the attic.

Between 1910 and 1916, Ben Legg married Olive Conners. In 1916 Olive gave birth to a daughter. According to family members, his wife died shortly after the child's birth and Ben gave his daughter to Olive's family to be raised.

In the 1920 census, Ben Legg was listed as a widower, and was living in Issaquah with his father and younger brother, Arthur. All three worked as miners. After his wife's death, Legg became something of a loner, although he was constantly accompanied by his adoring dog. Legg worked alternately in the woods and the mines, and was known to make moonshine with his brothers. In circa 1920 photograph, Ben is shown enjoying a drink with his peers at the Bellevue Hotel's bar in Issaquah.

On March 28 of 1920, Legg had reportedly been drinking moonshine when he set out after his neighbor, Tom Hall. There is no explanation for Legg's grudge with Hall, although the two apparently had a long-running feud. Legg supposedly emerged from his home at about 11 AM with his Winchester rifle in the crook of his arm. He fired two shots at Hall as the man fled his home, both of which missed their mark. Legg then followed Hall through town, shooting randomly. A bullet entered William Evans' home and missed Mrs. Evans by 18 inches.



Ben Legg's picture, as it appeared in the *Seattle Daily Times* article of March 29, 1920.

Another bullet struck the power station building (next door to the Grand Central Hotel). Legg reportedly stopped to threaten a Native American child who was walking along Mill Street with a companion. Both boys took off at a run and Legg fired into the distance, missing them. Legg also took a shot at Bert Hoyer, missing him as well. Then, according to the *Daily Times*, Legg stopped in his tracks at

the sight of a dog; the paper claimed that Ben Legg's rage drained away then, due to his affection for canine companions. Bert Hoyer disarmed Legg and led him home to be put to bed.

At 2 PM, King County Sheriff Matt Starwich and two deputies arrived to investigate. Legg fled his home at their arrival. They gave chase and spotted Ben crossing the creek, about to disappear into the trees beyond. They shot Legg twice, in his arm and just above his right hip. Their quarry was then easily apprehended.

On their way to the county hospital at Georgetown, Legg told Starwich, "Well, Matt, you would have been within your rights if you had killed me and I don't see why you didn't." Presumably Ben's injury healed and he didn't suffer any dire consequences from his arrest.

In 1930, Ben Legg was still living in Issaquah, alone. We can assume he had canine companionship although the federal census did not take pets into account. He lived on Mill Street, probably in the family home where he spent most of his life, and was out of work. Family recollections agree that he lived out the rest of his life in Issaquah and died sometime after 1942.

It is clear from historical records and family tales that Ben Legg's first forty years were filled with hardship and loss. The press branded him "bad" in 1920 and the name stuck. But was he really bad? In the newspaper account, there is no mention of the town marshal (who was at that time either Burn Mullarkey or Jack Chalfa, both longtime residents of Issaquah) attempting to apprehend Legg. Consider also that Bert Hoyer was hiding from Legg at one moment, and leading the man home to put him to bed the next. In 1920, Issaquah was a community of just under 800 people. In a town that small, people were acquainted with each other, and with each other's quirks, tendencies and shortcomings. Although the reader may draw his or her own conclusions, evidence suggests that most of the townspeople in Issaquah did not consider Ben Legg to be malicious, just one of their own, having a bad day.

Sources include: Seattle Daily Times, March 29, 1920; U.S. Federal Census records for 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930; the Washington State Birth Record, 1907-1919; The Leggs of Issaquah, a family tree; and correspondence with Patricia Gilbert, Legg descendent. The Issaquah Press for the week following the one-man shoot-out is difficult to find. If you have a copy of the April 2, 1920 Issaquah Press, or more information about Ben Legg, please let us know!

Fifteen Minutes With a Person From the Past

We recently asked members of the Issaquah community what person from the past they would most like to spend fifteen minutes with. The answers we received ran the gamut, from long-ago to fairly recent, from public figures to family members.

Debbie Berto, publisher of the Issaquah Press replied without hesitation, "Mayor Stella Alexander... She would have been a great subject for editorials!"

IHS volunteer and pioneer descendent Denny Croston said that he would like to talk with his great grandfather, James Croston. "I would like to know why he decided to move to the United States, Pennsylvania then Issaquah, how he met my great grandma, and how he knew she was the one he wanted to marry." James Croston emigrated to the United States from England. He came to the Issaquah area in 1885 to work as a carpenter. He was the original owner and operator of the Grand Central Hotel.

Patricia Kastle Gladwell, IHS member and author, said that she would like to spend fifteen minutes with John M. Stakebake, who was the town marshall in Issaquah from 1928 until 1931. Stakebake was also Pat's grandfather. "I would ask him how he treated the 'rowdy teenagers' who got out of hand while he was on duty and what exactly did they do that might be different from the modern day rowdies.... while I was growing up, he fascinated me with stories of the wild wild west during the reign of the Dalton Boys, how he had been part of the posse that captured them. There were so

many other stories ... that are now long forgotten."

Pioneer descendent Sue Cameron picked her great-grandmother Martha Bush as the person she would most like to spend fifteen minutes with. Sue would like to ask her grandmother how she felt in 1864 when her neighbors, the Castos, were killed by several Native American employees, specifically how she coped



Martha Bush and her husband James. (IHS 2002.16.1)



Stella Alexander on the day of her installation in office, 1932. (IHS 72.21.14.276)

with the situation as a young woman with four children to care for. Sue would also ask what the valley looked like as a wild place filled with large trees and wild animals. Finally, Sue would tell her great grandmother, "I have met your little sister Emily's grandson and his family. We are close friends. They live in Issaquah. Little did you know when you left Oregon that you would never see each other again... I think you lived a life you can be very proud of and had a wonderful family."

IHS docent and volunteer Jim Loring said, "If I could talk for 15 minutes with someone from Issaquah history, it would be interesting to chat with the folks who first started the Salmon Days festival. What was the objective? Did Salmon Days morph from earlier community traditions and festivals, or was it seen as a way to raise funds for the Chamber?"

The research files at the museum help to answer this last question. The guiding force behind the founding of Salmon Days was Earl M. Robertson, who passed away in 1995 at the age of 81. Robertson served as co-grand marshal at the 1994 Salmon Days event. According to an Issaquah Press article about Robertson, he came up with the idea of Salmon Days after learning that about 15,000 people a year come to the city annually to watch the salmon. He decided it would be a great opportunity for an event, and pitched the idea to the Chamber of Commerce.

As for what Stella Alexander, James Croston, John Stakebake or Martha Bush would say, it can only be left to our imaginations.

News Notes & Upcoming Events

On Wednesday, January 21, the Issaquah Historical Society, King County Office of Historic Preservation and the City of Issaquah will share information about our recent **ISSAQUAH PROPERTY INVENTORY**. The presentation will take place at the Issaquah Depot at 7 PM. The purpose of the property inventory was to survey properties in Issaquah over the age of 50 years, and to determine their historic value. The first half of the inventory was completed in 1999. The recently-completed second half includes one hundred additional properties. This information will also be available to the public at the Gilman Town Hall's research center.

WINTERTIME IN ISSAQUAH, the Gilman Town Hall's latest exhibit, features a sleigh hand-made by Herman Peltola, a local farmer, in 1910. There are also old skis, snow shoes, ice skates, and other artifacts of winters long past. The museum is open Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 11 AM to 3 PM.

Thanks go to **GUS MELONUS** of **BURLINGTON NORTHERN & SANTA FE RAILWAY Co.** for assisting IHS volunteer Eric Martin obtain a link and pin coupler.

A big, spicy, meaty thank you to all the volunteers who helped out at the Rogue Brewhouse Chili Cook-Off. **MARILYN BATURA, MARILYN BOYDEN, SHERRY GRINDELAND, JIM LORING** and **LINDA RUEHLE** all

came out to help, and even agreed to don period accessories. Sherry Grindeland also donated many of the ingredients, and her own personal chili recipe. Although we didn't win first place, we made more than \$100 and had fun.

This fall the Depot underwent a subtle transformation. The **CITY OF ISSAQUAH** replaced the railing that surrounds the Depot decking, and added safety fencing to prevent falls and accidents. Many of the depot windows were also replaced and **ISSAQUAH GLASS** generously donated all the labor costs of installation. Finally, more than three dozen commemorative bricks were installed in the walkway north of the Depot by **CHUCK CERAR, DENNY CROSTON, BARB JUSTICE** and **JIM LORING**. During Salmon Days, thousands of visitors stream past the Depot. Many thanks to everyone who helped us make sure we could show the Depot in its best light!

LINDA HJELM, JIM LORING and **MILT SWANSON** all helped to make our first mining lecture and hike a success. Thanks go to these dedicated (and knowledgeable) volunteers, and to the folks who attended.

Issaquah Historical Society members Todd and Nan Sargeant welcome a son, **FINLEY ALVAR SARGEANT**, who was born November 5.

We regret to inform you of the passing of IHS member **RUSSELL JOHN SEIL** in September 2003. Mr. Seil was a descendant of one of Issaquah's pioneer families. He once confessed to being involved in a foray to tip over Mayor Stella Alexander's outhouse.

PAT HEALEY, longtime member of the IHS, passed away on November 24. Mrs. Healey had been a member of the Issaquah community since 1955.

Board Meeting Schedule

Board meetings are held the second Thursday of every month, at 7 PM, at the Depot. Meetings are open to the public, although participation is limited to board members and those who have been placed on the agenda. Contact the IHS office at 425/392-3500 for more information. Meeting dates for 2004 are:

January 8	July 8
February 12	August 12
March 11	September 9
April 8	October 14
May 13	November TBA
June 10	December 9

CORRECTION: We regret our failure to mention that Gordon Smart is the brother of Nellimae Smart Nolet and Raymond Smart in the autumn newsletter article, "How Farms Became a State Park." Also, our thanks go to Nellimae Smart Nolet for donating the photos used in this article.

More Endowment Gifts Arrive

An endowment is a pool of money which is never spent, but is instead invested. Interest earned is put towards an organization's operating expenses. The Issaquah Historical Society's endowment currently amounts to \$17,750. Our goal is to build an endowment of \$3 million in order to sustain the organization.

Our thanks go to these recent endowment donors:

Mayme & Ed Bischoff
 Tom Donegan
 Patricia Gilbert
 Faye & Elmer Green
 Issaquah Valley Grange #581
 Jacqueline Kennedy
 Loretta Lewis
 Joe Peterson
 Imogene Woodside
 Judy Young

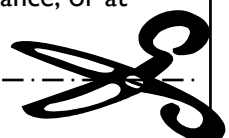
Endowment donations are tax-deductible. Currently, gifts to the endowment are being matched by an anonymous donor. That means that your gift will be worth twice as much! Use the form below if you would like to contribute to this source of sustained support for our historic preservation and public education work.

New Logging Lecture Series Scheduled

This winter Eric Erickson, researcher and author of the King County Lumber Index, will offer his popular lecture series, Trees, Logging and Lumber Milling. Each lecture is accompanied by slide shows, old films and oral presentations. There will be plenty of new information and visuals in this year's series, so don't miss it! Lectures will be held on Saturdays from 11 AM until 12:30 PM at the Issaquah Depot. The schedule is as follows:

February 21: Big Trees
 February 28: Felling & Bucking
 March 6: Skidding & Yarding
 March 13: Hauling by Truck, Rail or Horse & Wagon
 March 20: Sawmills & People

Issaquah Historical Society members attend for free; admission for non-members is \$7 per lecture. Non-members may purchase a lecture series package for \$35; this includes attendance at the series, membership in the Society for one year and a copy of the updated King County Lumber Index, published in 2003. Lecture series packages may be purchased in advance, or at the door.



Membership Renewal Form

- I would like to make a donation of \$_____ to the IHS endowment fund.
- I am enclosing my membership dues of \$_____.
- Individual (\$20) Senior/Student (\$10) Family (\$25) Senior Family (\$15) Corporate (\$50)
- I would like to volunteer as a docent; contact me with more information.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ / _____ Work Phone: _____ / _____

E-mail: _____

Mail donations to: IHS, P.O. Box 695, Issaquah, WA 98027. Call 425/392-3500 with questions. Please make checks payable to the Issaquah Historical Society (IHS). The Issaquah Historical Society is a non profit 501(c)(3) organization, tax ID #23-7425589. All gifts are tax-deductible as allowed by law.

History Nights in 2004

The 2004 Winter History Night will be held on Tuesday, January 13, at 7 PM at the Depot. Issaquah Valley Trolley Communications Director J. Craig Thorpe and other members of the Issaquah Valley Trolley Team will join us for a presentation on the status of the Issaquah Valley Trolley (IVT). The program will include a PowerPoint presentation on the IVT's vision and its next steps in restoring rail passenger service to Issaquah. As always, Issaquah History Nights are open to the public and refreshments will be served.

Save the date for these upcoming history night as well:

Spring History Night, April 13

The Mountains to Sound Greenway Story

Summer History Night, July 13

Seventy-five Years of the Issaquah Kiwanis

Autumn History Night, October 12

History of the Lake Sammamish State Park

Past Times is a publication of the Issaquah Historical Society, written by Museum Director Erica S. Maniez. Now in its 31st year, the IHS works to preserve and interpret the history of Issaquah and the surrounding area.

425/392-3500

info@issaquahhistory.org

www.issaquahhistory.org

Issaquah Depot

50 Rainier Blvd. N

Open Fri., Sat. & Sun.

11-3

Gilman Town Hall

165 SE Andrews St.

Open Thurs., Fri., & Sat.

11-3

ATTENTION MEMBERS: IS IT TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP? PLEASE LOOK AT YOUR MAILING LABEL. IF YOUR RENEWAL DATE IS COMING UP, YOU CAN HELP US SAVE TIME AND POSTAGE BY MAILING IN YOUR RENEWAL NOW. THANK YOU!



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**WINTER HISTORY NIGHT:
THE ISSAQUAH VALLEY TROLLEY**
(more info, page 6)