

Speech presented by Rick Anderson on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Historical Society

Where does the time go? It flies, according to the proverb, and 1975 seems like just yesterday in some ways. It was a time of monumental change on our island.

Sons and daughters of the pioneers were passing away, and our connection to the early settlers was fading. Early in 1975, several prominent and revered islanders died, including Bessie Cammon, Rudy Johnson, and Andrew Anderson, each a true pillar of the community in his and her own way. The Riviera Community Club was less than 10 years old, and people had just started building and moving to their lots. Electric power and dial phones were new harbingers of a different future.

In the spring of 1975, a group of islanders began meeting to advance the dream of having a museum on the island, in hopes that the Johnson farm, then defunct, could fulfill that role.

Those were heady times. In July, papers were filed to form the Anderson Island Historical Society. The actual date of incorporation was August 2, 1975. In September, Alma Ruth Laing and her father, Al Laing, deeded nearly 10 acres of the Johnson Farm, including the farmhouse and the outbuildings, to be our museum.

It would be hard to overstate the role of Lois Scholl in the founding of the museum. Lois moved to the island in 1969 or 70, one of the very first to live full-time in the Riviera. She couldn't have been an inch over 4'10", but she had a big heart, big dreams, and abundant energy. Lois became good friends with Rudy Johnson, cared for him through ill health, and used to tell him the farm would make an excellent museum. He never took that very seriously, but Lois also befriended and cared for Alma Ruth, and planted the seed that a museum would be a wonderful monument to the Johnson family. She spearheaded the community meetings and volunteered her attorney nephew's time to draw up the articles of incorporation. and she was listed as "the incorporator." That is why she is known as the "Mother of the Museum," and you can see her portrait in the Farmhouse and the Archival Building.

In September of 1975, we held a banquet attended by over 100 people to thank Alma Ruth and her father and inaugurate the new museum. Then we got to work! The farm was in serious disrepair. Fortunately, there was a group of recently retired handymen, including especially Ralph Christianson and Russ Cammon, who practically lived at the farm, hammering, painting, roofing, shoveling - all things that go on to this day, of course. Our board meetings were held in the living room of the farmhouse. Some of us wanted to have someone live in the house, so it would be more secure. That is what was approved by the board, and a candidate recruited, but it almost provoked a riot and the plan was scrubbed.

In 1976 we took over hosting the Salmon Bake, which was a tradition started by the Anderson Island boat club, going back to the 1950's. They would literally go out that morning and catch enough salmon to feed 50, 60 people whatever, at Christiansons' Beach at Otso Point. Later that year, we had the first Cider Squeeze, with two hand-cranked cider presses. one was donated by Lois Scholl, and it can be seen down at the barn to this day. the photo contest was initiated that year, with the goal of creating an on-going record of life on the island. In the 1980's the community gardens were established. Chet Palmer was hired to build the dragon – or is it a horse? – to take the crankiness out of the cider squeeze, in the 1990's the orchard was planted, under the leadership of Dick Throm.

When the society celebrated its 25th anniversary in the year 2000, Bettymae Anderson suggested that we embark on the construction of an archival library building. Instead, a committee formed with the purpose of formulating goals to meet by the time of our 50th anniversary in 2025. Of course, that seemed like an impossibly long time, but the committee, which included Randy and Bmae Anderson, Ed and Lucy Stephenson, Dave and Jeanne McGoldrick, Dick Throm and yours truly began meeting monthly and kicking around ideas. We soon decided that what we needed was a large archival storage building. By 2008, we had secured the voluntary services of an architect, Norifume Hashibe, who developed three alternative concepts which were presented to the public in the fall of 2008. They were each estimated to cost around \$1.5 million.

A funny thing happened that year, namely a disastrous financial crisis with the collapse of many banks and other financial institutions. The prospects for raising that kind of money seemed kind of dim, so it was back to the drawing board. We looked at all kinds of alternatives for erecting a low-cost building, with the main criterion besides its function that it fit in harmoniously with the rest of the farm. One night we came up with the idea of two chicken coop structures joined by a central hall, and the strategy of building it ourselves with primarily volunteer labor. This plan actually succeeded, through a series of almost miraculous events.

By 2018 we had our new archival building, seven years ahead of our 2025 goal! We recognize and thank an incredible 20,000 man-hours of volunteer labor, generous private donations of nearly \$300,000, and a Washington State grant of a quarter of a million dollars secured by Dave McGoldrick. From the original vision of a storage building, the Archival Building has become the symbol of the Historical Society's outreach to the island, providing facilities for everything from exercise classes to concerts and memorial services. All of this is documented in Bob Bedoll and (Rick Anderson and) John Larsen's wonderful movie, *The Johnson Farm Story*. Other movies, *the Anderson Island Story* and the delightful

Good Ship Tahoma have taken our efforts to preserve, document, and educate the public on the history of our island to an entirely new level.

Obviously, this historical society and our museum are the result of tremendous teamwork and community support, but I especially want to recognize the role of our current president, Bob Bedoll, and our immediate past president, Ed Stephenson, for leading us into what some are calling the golden age of the historical society. Words honestly fail me; suffice it to say that we all owe an immense debt of gratitude for the leadership of these men.

As we look to the future, we have several on-going projects which promise to secure an even more glorious future. one is the new signage project spearheaded by Bob Bedoll, which has made our collection more accessible and understandable to today's public, many of whom know nothing about life on a farm. Another is the plan to extend some TLC to the bare wooden exteriors of our precious outbuildings, undertaken by Rick Stockstad. Under the leadership of Mary Rabe, the iconic Johnson Farmhouse is getting a much-needed makeover. Another is the reinventing of the *Thick & Thin Sawmill exhibit*, the brainchild of Phil Lutes. Just underway is the *Heritage Apple Orchard*, where by grafting, we are creating new trees from some of the more than hundred-year-old, virtually extinct varieties found in pioneer orchards around the island.

These, and so many other projects are fun, exciting, and could use your Help and support. The pride and joy we feel about our historical society are due entirely to the support of our wonderful community, from those long-ago days fifty years ago to this very day. Truly, this historical society is one of the great loves of my life, and hopefully of yours too!

Thank you. Keep up the good work!!!