

# 100 YEARS

OF CHALLENGE AND CHANGE



# WHATCOM *Women*

AND THE BELLINGHAM YWCA

LYNNE MASLAND



WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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VOTES FOR WOMEN

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LIBERTY OR DEATH

VOTE FOR WOMEN

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In Honor of the Bellingham YWCA's  
Centennial Anniversary  
1907-2007



**Cover caption:** YWCA members wait their turn in the 1924 Tulip Parade's staging area on Forest Street. The Tulip Festival was held throughout the 1920s with YWCA entries emphasizing global unity and international peace. Photo by Fred Jukes.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

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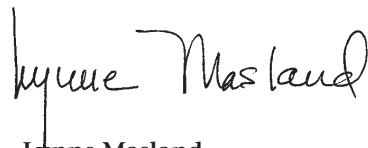
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## “My Name Was Helen!”

Kathryn Anderson, a professor of history and women’s studies at Western Washington University’s Fairhaven College, tells of a cartoon she had posted on her office door for several years. The cartoon pictured an elderly woman lying in her coffin and holding up a placard. The sign read “My name was Helen!”

The cartoon illustrates one of the most persistent problems in researching married women’s public lives: discovering their given names. Until the 1960s, married women were commonly referred to in print and even in board minutes by their husband’s names, *i.e.* Mrs. Walter Smith, Mrs. W.E. Smith or just Mrs. Smith. Uncovering their own names, *i.e.* Mary Smith, requires much digging in city directories and census reports. Indeed, in Whatcom County, a wife’s name was included with her husband’s entry only after the 1911 city directory.

Since I think a woman comes to life more if we know that her name was Lucretia, Alwina, Frances or Mary, I have attempted to provide given names for the women mentioned in this book whenever I’ve been able to find them, with their husband’s name in parentheses on first mention. In the few cases where I have not located a name, I have regretfully resorted to simply using her “married” name. In this research, I want to especially thank Jeff Jewell of the Whatcom Museum of History and Art for helping me find as many of the earlier Whatcom County women’s names as we could.



Lynne Masland

# A Century of Challenge and Change

Written to celebrate the YWCA of Bellingham centennial, this book focuses on one volunteer organization in one region of our state. And yet, it is also the history of enormous challenges and changes in the lives of American women and their families since 1907.

It does not attempt to capture the experiences of all women. Those are as varied as the individuals who lived them. It does picture the journey from women's circumscribed lives at the start of the 20th century to their greatly expanded horizons at the beginning of the 21st – with the new challenges they bring.

Through good times and bad, the YWCA adapted programs to meet current needs, but never wavered in its mission of service to women, their families and the Whatcom County community

In 1907, the state of Washington was 18 years old. The City of Bellingham, as we know it, was three. What is now Western Washington University was an eight-year-old teacher's training school. Whatcom County's economy was largely based on agriculture, lumbering, milling, fishing, coal mining and shipping.

Women's right to vote in state elections was three years away and the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was 12 years from ratification. Women had few employment, educational, recreational and cultural opportunities.

In the early 20th century, the Bellingham YWCA helped young women arriving from rural areas and overseas live "wholesome lives" by offering inexpensive safe housing, "respectable" job referrals and moral support. Today, we help women in crisis and low-income women to new lives in a much different world.

We are one of nearly 300 associations in the United States, allied with another 121 worldwide. Each meets community-based needs; all share the same commitment to service.

Like all volunteer organizations, the YWCA can only continue its work through the dedication of our members and the support of our friends. The author of this book is both. Lynne Masland has volunteered many hundreds of hours researching and writing this tribute to women of our country, state and community.

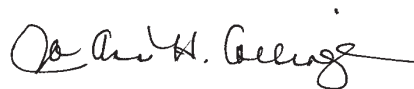
At its start, a YWCA stated purpose was "to promote growth in Christian character and service through physical, social, mental and spiritual training." Its leaders were women of means, most wives of prominent men.

As the YWCA USA mission statement now says, the association remains "nourished by its roots in the Christian faith." But it has evolved to embrace the widest possible range of religious, economic and ethnic diversity. Members are "sustained by the richness of many beliefs and values" and share a common vision: "peace and justice, freedom and dignity for all people."

Since the national convention adopted "The One Imperative" in 1970, eliminating racism has been a keystone commitment and challenge.

As the YWCA of Bellingham continues its service to women and families, our nation is once again experiencing uncertain times. Lottie Roeder Roth described another difficult period, the late 1890s, in her early history of Whatcom County. The community rallied, she wrote, with "fortitude and resourcefulness" and "a constructive spirit."

Women and men of this community share that spirit. It has made it possible for the YWCA of Bellingham to serve this county for 100 years and greet a second century with gratitude and confidence.



**Jo Collinge, President**  
*YWCA of Bellingham Board 2007-2008*

# Highlights of YWCA History

**1855** - Young Women's Christian Association founded in London

**1858** - YWCA movement arrives in New York City, begins spreading to campuses and cities across the country

**1890s** - City YWCAs begin Travelers Aid Societies to protect, and find suitable housing and employment for young women arrivals

African-American and Native American associations open in Ohio and Oklahoma

**1894** - American, English, Norwegian and Swedish associations form the World YWCA

**1899** - Immediately popular YWCA Club starts at just-opened New Whatcom Normal School (now Western Washington University)

**1906** - Separate city groups and campus clubs merge in U.S. national YWCA



Bellingham Normal welcomes state YWCA convention, inspiring women community leaders to begin a city association

**1907** - Bellingham city YWCA officially founded December 17



**1908** - First Bellingham YWCA established in basement of new downtown Carnegie Library with support from local businesses and the Aftermath Club

**1910** - Washington legislature approves women's suffrage

**1912** - Frances Axtell of Bellingham and Nina Croake of Tacoma are first two women elected to the state legislature

**1915** - YWCA's North Forest home opens, a gift from C.X. and Frances Larrabee, with swimming pool, cafeteria, classes, clubs, affordable housing for young women new to the community

**1918** - U.S. Enters World War I. National YWCA establishes Girl Reserves, a war-effort support and character-building club for middle-school students



**1920** - Nineteenth U.S. Constitutional Amendment, women's suffrage, ratified

**1930s** - Bellingham YWCA trains young women for available employment during Great Depression

**1940s** - Bellingham YWCA aids European Relief efforts of Clementine Churchill, supports the U.S. war effort including Red Cross and USO that the national YWCA co-founded



**1946** - National YWCA adopts the Interracial Charter, integrating separate associations

**1950s** - In the post-war “Baby Boom” era, family-oriented programs and Y-Teen programs are the primary focus

**1960s/70s** - Building women’s leadership skills and meeting emerging community concerns are paramount, among them, breast cancer awareness and recuperation, violence against women, skilled trades training and job placement, shelter for women mental patients and a jail alternative for women



**1970** - YWCA USA adopts the One Imperative, eliminating racism

**1973** - Women of the Eco-Action Committee, together with Rotary of Bellingham, rally public support to create Boulevard Park

**1979** - Bellingham YWCA listed on the National Historic Register

**1980s/90s** - Funding shortfalls, and changing community needs, spark program reevaluation, the pool closes, services focus on needs of low-income and at-risk women, the Back-to-Work Boutique and Other Bank are launched

**1991** - National YWCA adopts current mission statement emphasizing racial and economic diversity and “the richness of many beliefs and values”



**1998** - Dorothy Place, transitional housing and services for families surviving domestic abuse – named for the late YWCA Board President Dorothy Giesecke – opens under the aegis of the Opportunity Council

**1999** - First women inducted into the Northwest Women’s Hall of Fame, which recognizes Whatcom women’s exemplary community service

**2002** - With generous community support, the three residential floors are renovated to current codes and dedicated to transitional housing for women in crisis



**2007** - Bellingham YWCA launches its year-long Centennial Celebration with Bellingham Rotary, WECU and PSE underwriting renovation of the main floor

**2008** - YWCA USA, with 300-plus associations, celebrates 150 years of service



A well-dressed woman with her shopping bundle stops on the wood planked sidewalk along unpaved Holly Street, circa 1900.

*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

## Women's Lives in Early Whatcom County

The scattered settlements around Bellingham Bay had grown slowly, with many ups and downs, since Henry Roeder and Russell V. Peabody visited the mouth of Whatcom Creek in 1852 and established their mill. The wives of the early settlers were sometimes of Lummi or Nooksack heritage, women long familiar with the land and its people. Arriving pioneers were determined to meet the challenges of their new lives.

In her two-volume *History of Whatcom County*, Lottie Roeder Roth,<sup>1</sup> the daughter of Henry Roeder, tells of the removal of the great Portage Log Jam on the Nooksack River below Ferndale in the 1870s. The log jam, three-quarters of a mile in length, prevented boats other than canoes from going further up the river to other settlements and also was responsible for making the flooding worse. The government and the “men folk seemed disinclined to do anything about [it’s] removal,”<sup>2</sup> so in March, 1876, the settlers’ wives organized.

Led by Phoebe (Mrs. Holden A.) Judson of Lynden<sup>3</sup> and Mary (Mrs. M.D.) Smith of Whatcom, they solicited \$500 in cash, labor or provisions to secure the log jam’s removal. By that September \$450 had been raised and a contract let to probate judge John A. Plaster. With the help of Lummi workmen and dynamite, the task was accomplished. Through the women’s enterprise, Roth concludes, the Nooksack was opened to steamer traffic for many miles. Their action contributed greatly to the prosperity of the Nooksack Valley, since at that time, rivers were the principal means of transport of people and supplies. By 1902, Lynden was well-known for exporting hops, hay, livestock, fruit, dairy products, grain, timber and shingles.

In the towns around the Bay, the streets were unpaved or lined with logs or wood planks to fend off the mud. Sidewalks, where they existed, were also of wood planks. But by the 1890s, although the streets remained planked or dirt, electric street railways ran on Garden, Maple, Forest, Chestnut, Dock Streets and out Holly Street to Eldridge and the west city limits. During this decade, telephone service, electric lights, and water works were installed in the city.

Envisioning a future center of Northwest commerce and trade, the Bellingham Bay Improvement Company, led by San Franciscan Pierre B. Cornwall<sup>4</sup> and a group of California investors, began investing heavily in land, businesses and natural resources in 1889. This latest in a series of several short-lived economic booms for the area essentially lasted just two years. Then the national Panic of 1893, reputedly the worst in U.S. history to that point, followed by another somewhat less severe 1896 downturn, further eroded the local economy.

The years after the 1889-1891 boom bubble burst were especially hard ones, but the community proved generous in adversity with subscriptions and volunteer help maintaining important community assistance. Soup was made in a house on D Street by volunteer women and distributed to needy families three times a week. The meat markets and stores donated soup ingredients; women provided the labor. The New Whatcom Benevolent Society was formed in 1898. The influx of Scandinavian and Croatian immigrants was heavy during those years, and a free English language school was set up at Larrabee School with ladies volunteering to teach the classes. The Immanuel School of Industries taught industrial arts, including crafts and sewing to children to prepare them for work, again with women volunteering to teach.

To discourage duplication of charities, a mass meeting was held in January 1898 to form the United Charities of New Whatcom with Rev. J. W. Miller, president; Hiram E. Hadley, vice president and City Clerk F.B. Graves, secretary-treasurer. This was followed that December by the organization of the Associated Charities with president Frances (Mrs. William H.) Axtell, who would become, in 1912, one of the first of two women elected to the Washington State Legislature.<sup>5</sup> Emma V. Lilley was vice president and Marcella (Mrs. Ernest W.) Purdy, treasurer. Nevertheless, independent charities and churches continued to provide assistance.

During the 1890s a number of permanent church buildings were constructed, and the two hospitals – Saint Joseph’s and Saint Luke’s – were founded. Public libraries were established in Fairhaven and New Whatcom, and a business college started. Roth notes that the decade,

“singularly featured as it was with depression and disaster, fortitude and resourcefulness, and internal strife that kindled bitterness in some, inspired in most of the men and women of Whatcom County ... a constructive spirit and heroic courage.”<sup>6</sup>

At the end of the century, Whatcom County was still pioneer country, and the towns around the Bay “rough and ready” places. The primary industries of logging, coal mining, fishing and milling brought hundreds of unmarried men seeking livelihoods; these men often lived in boarding houses or logging camps and sought weekend entertainment in saloons and brothels.

Considering the conditions in Whatcom County especially after the promising times of the early 1890s had passed, Roth comments that “there were hundreds of disappointed, almost desperate men stranded here when the tide of fortune turned.” In these still-raw towns with their rough environment, which was encouraged by the resource industries and social customs of the West, there was also a growing middle class of businessmen and churchmen, schoolteachers and mothers, who were busy creating a more “civilized” community. They gave rise to the various local clubs, social and welfare organizations and civic improvements.

Despite an increasing number of women leaders, social norms and values of the time dictated a rather circumscribed life for most; marriage and child rearing was the generally accepted foremost goal. Married women usually did not work outside the home except in cases of extreme need and could not hold property in their own names or obtain loans. Most women, including working women and teachers, did not customarily live by themselves.

Only a few occupations were open to women, usually at lower salaries. In the towns around Bellingham Bay, women with minimal skills or education worked in the fish cannery, laundries, in the candy factory, or as cooks or domestics. Retail sales and office work – clerks, stenographers, typists and bookkeepers – were the main occupations open to more skilled women.

Although there were a handful of women doctors and lawyers in the country, the most acceptable professions for single women were librarian, teacher and nurse. Generally they voluntarily left their fields when they wed; by contract, teachers were required to stop teaching upon marriage, a prohibition that continued in many places up until, or after, World War II.

## Rules for Teachers in 1915

Although teaching was an accepted profession for single women, their conduct was carefully controlled. The contract for teachers in many small towns and rural areas, including Bellingham and Whatcom County, stipulated that teachers would not marry during the term of their contract.

They could not keep company with men; must be home between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless attending a school function; could not loiter downtown in ice cream stores; travel beyond city limits without the permission of the chairman of the [school] board; ride in a carriage or automobile with any man unless he was her father or brother; and could not smoke cigarettes. Their dress and appearance were to be strictly modest. Accordingly to contract, teachers could not dress in bright colors; were forbidden under any circumstances to dye their hair; had to wear at least two petticoats; and their dresses could not be any shorter than two inches above the ankle.

By contract, teachers were also required to keep the school room neat and clean. They had to sweep the floor at least once daily; scrub the floor at least once a week with hot, soapy water; clean the blackboards at least once a day; and start the fire at 7 a.m. so the room would be warm by 8 a.m.

In return, women primary and grammar school teachers were paid around \$50 to \$60 a month by 1911. In contrast, the executive director of the YWCA in that same year was paid \$100 per month, nearly double a teacher’s salary.<sup>7</sup>

## “Scrubbing Beyond Our Backdoors”

The Civil War had released many women from their strictly household duties to aid in the war effort – rolling bandages, knitting socks and sewing shirts for soldiers, and filling in for men who were away at the front. As Jennifer Cote writes in her essay on the early Boston YWCA, “it is quite possible that the legions of women who joined soldier’s aid societies, local women’s auxiliaries of the United States Sanitary Commission, and other Civil War organizations paved the way for the YWCA. Such groups popularized the understanding that women could perform gender-specific duties outside the home.”<sup>1</sup>

After the war, women in cities and towns began to form secular or philanthropic clubs. Many fostered self-improvement through study groups where they presented papers on literary works and discussed art and music or philosophy. Others sought to address a range of national or local social issues such as world peace, voting rights for women, settlement houses for the inflow of immigrants, attacks on corruption in politics, public health and sanitation issues or charitable work for the needy.

Especially at the beginning of the club movement, women who launched cultural and civic organizations were sharply criticized in editorials and magazine articles for neglecting their proper duties. Women began to defend their expanding interests as “civic housekeeping” or “scrubbing a little beyond our backdoors.” They included the community in the “domestic sphere,” which had been their domain. The club movement spread quickly as relatives or friends traveled by train to visit other relatives or friends and brought news of their new activities.

These clubs were populated by middle-class women, often the wives of successful businessmen, doctors or attorneys, who did not have to work outside the home and had sufficient household help to allow “leisure pursuits.” Since most were mothers, the clubs met from September to

June when the children were in school. Usually women waited until their last child was in first grade before joining a club, so members were often nearing middle-age. As Karen Blair, Central Washington University professor of history, notes, photographs of these early clubwomen reveal “graying hair, low bosoms, and large hats.”<sup>2</sup>

By the 1890s, women were attending college in growing numbers, and some were becoming nationally known as crusaders for a variety of causes. These early movements resulted in such organizations as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the American Red Cross, the women’s suffrage movement and the YWCA. Names of inspiring women leaders would have been known to most Americans during the late 19th century: Harriet Beecher Stowe, abolitionist and author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; Clara Barton, Civil War nurse for the Union Army and founder of the American Red Cross; Frances Willard, founder of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU); and Susan B. Anthony, women’s rights advocate and suffragette.



Harriet Beecher Stowe

Jane Addams, founder of the U.S. Settlement House movement, was the first American woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1899, Addams co-founded Hull House in Chicago, a slum area settlement house that included night school, language and adult classes, a swimming pool, gymnasium and employment bureau. Many of these facilities and programs were also YWCA objectives, although for a somewhat different clientele.

Less well known nationally was Abigail Scott Duniway, educator and women’s rights advocate, who lived and wrote in Portland, Oregon. She supported the Married Women’s Property Act, which gave Oregon women the right to own and control property. She was a key figure in the suffrage movement in the Northwest. Washington State was the fifth state to pass a women’s suffrage act in 1910; Oregon followed in 1912.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, women in several western states had been able to vote in state elections since the 1890s: Wyoming extended suffrage to women in 1890; Colorado in 1893, Utah in 1895 and Idaho in 1896. Women in all six states were able to vote locally several years before the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1920.

The social turmoil of migration and immigration, the popularity of literary and social improvement clubs following the Civil War, and the emergence of strong, inspiring women leaders set the stage for the period of women's activism seen at the end of the 19th century and into the 20th.



Clara Barton



Jane Addams



Susan B. Anthony

## The Long Road to Women's Voting Rights

"Women's voices and influence have always been a part of Washington's history, even without the vote," writes Shanna Stevenson, coordinator of the Washington Women's History Consortium that is preparing for the 2010 centennial of women's suffrage in the state.<sup>1</sup> "Washington women's success in 1910 helped inspire the campaign that culminated in passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, when women won the right to vote nationally."

Throughout the 1850s and 60s, Stevenson notes, women were alternately allowed and then restricted from participating in local school board elections. By general agreement in 1871 and outright in 1877, the Territorial Legislature passed a law enfranchising tax-paying women for school elections, reflecting the prevailing belief that women had a "sphere" that included home and family matters. Even this limited franchise would not be made permanent until 1890.

As early as 1854, Territorial legislator Arthur A. Denny of Seattle attempted to gain suffrage for women but lost, by one vote. Despite efforts of suffragist leaders Susan B. Anthony and Oregon's Abigail Scott Duniway, suffrage bills were narrowly defeated in 1871 and, again, in 1881. A petition signed by 600 men and women urged delegates to the first Washington State Constitutional Convention in 1878 to adopt women's suffrage in the statehood document; it was excluded by a one-vote margin.

A suffrage bill was finally passed, signed into law November 23, 1883 and affirmed by the Territorial Supreme Court the following year. Women's votes began to play a significant political role, especially in reforms at the local level and in enacting local-option prohibition.

In the words of Phoebe Goodell Judson, who came to Lynden in 1871: "For four years, from 1883 to 1887, the territory of Washington enjoyed impartial suffrage. I took my turn on petit and grand jury, served on election boards, walked in perfect harmony to the polls, by the side of my staunch Democratic husband, and voted the Republican ticket – not feeling any more out of my sphere than when assisting my husband to develop the resources of our country."<sup>2</sup>

The impact was short-lived. In 1888, Stevenson notes, the Washington Territorial Supreme Court ruled the suffrage law void because Congress had not intended to empower territories to enact women's suffrage. A separate issue on the state constitution ballot in 1889 lost as did an 1898 constitutional amendment, both by substantial margins. New, more organized efforts began in earnest by 1906 under the leadership of Tacoma resident Emma Smith DeVoe, a professional organizer for the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and noted suffragist May Arkwright Hutton of Spokane.

During the 1909-10 constitutional amendment campaign, the suffragists distributed one million pieces of literature and received the backing of Washington State Grange, labor unions, the Farmer's Union and other influential groups. The amendment was adopted by a 2-to-1 margin, but allowed only those who could read and speak English to vote and provided that "Indians not taxed shall never be allowed the elective franchise." Many women, including Asians, who were subject to other restrictive laws, were still denied the right to vote.



"The victory in 1910 was an important culmination of the fight for the rights of women as citizens," Stevenson writes, "but only the beginning of a century of women's activism to shape Washington."

Abigail Scott Duniway of Oregon, a prominent women's suffrage leader, campaigned for women's right to vote and own property.



The Donovan House at 1201 Garden Street, owned by J. J. and Clara Donovan, was the locale for many early women's club meetings, including the Monday Club.

*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



## Whatcom County Clubwomen

“The club spirit is abroad in the land,” claimed a Whatcom County newspaper in 1896. “The past decade has been emphatically an era of Women’s Clubs. All over the country in city, town and hamlet, the woman’s club has become an important institution.”<sup>1</sup> These women were primarily thoughtful, concerned middle-class women living in cities or towns.<sup>2</sup>

During this era, Lottie Roeder Roth writes in *The History of Whatcom County*, a number of clubs sprang up in Whatcom County. Some became permanent organizations of the cities and towns, and some lived a short life and, from “lack of spirit or enthusiasm, gradually subsided and either came to new life under a different name or died out altogether.”

The **Monday Club**, formed by Lulu (Mrs. James A.) Kerr and Mrs. B.B. Seymour in Fairhaven in January 1892, continues to this day as the oldest literary club in Bellingham. Roth describes the founders of the Monday Club as “women of culture and attainment,” desiring an organization for “mutual pleasure and profit.”

Clara (Mrs. J. J.) Donovan, whose husband was general superintendent of the Bellingham Bay & British Columbia Railroad and later president of the First National Bank, was a charter member. She was apparently a dedicated “clubwoman” for her name is included on the roster of a number of clubs through the 1920s. The first literary work studied by the club was Washington Irving’s “Astoria.” For many years, studies of Shakespeare and Robert Browning formed a frequent part of the programs. But they also discussed vital social issues such as child labor, race relations, women’s suffrage, “the liquor question,” and co-education.<sup>3</sup>

Roth describes the important role that clubs played in the lives of these women. Shortly after the Monday Club was formed, the boom days of Fairhaven during the late 1880s and early 1890s suddenly ended in the national financial crash known as the “Panic of 1893,” which severely affected Fairhaven and the little towns around the Bay. Writing in the 1920s, Roth recalls, “More deadly than a bursting bomb could have been was this bursting boom to the women of Fairhaven at that time; the effects of a bursting bomb are soon over and can be reckoned with but a bursting

boom casts its sinister shadow for years.” She adds that more than one of the charter members had been heard to say, “I think I should have died during those days of disappointment if it had not been for the Monday Club.”<sup>4</sup>

Roth concludes, “They went to church on Sunday to learn how to bear their troubles; they went to the club on Monday [afternoon] to forget them, to lose themselves in the inspirational work of genius.”<sup>5</sup>

The Aftermath Reading Circle, established in 1895, was another long-lived literary club formed when Mattie (Mrs. Hiram E.) Hadley and Delia (Mrs. J.R.) Crites went to spend the afternoon with Sarah (Mrs. C.W.) Dorr and made plans for a reading circle. Shortly afterwards, the group formed, meeting in homes where a member would read an article of her choice while the others listened and did light needlework. Among the charter members was Frances Axtell, who was, at this same time, president of the Whatcom Ladies Cooperative Society.

After meeting informally on alternate Mondays for about a year, the group decided to formally organize into the **Aftermath Club**, with Mattie Hadley as president. The name, suggested by Mrs. Hadley, referred to a “second gleanings.” It has also been suggested that women often waited until their last child was in school to join, hence the “aftermath.” The club, limited to 100 active members and 25 associates, studied history, art, literature, music and social issues and was primarily of a literary and social bent.

Members also brought about civic improvements such as a public drinking fountain at Holly and Commercial streets and actively led a movement to control wandering livestock as the city grew. They held fundraisers for a variety of causes, including the YMCA and YWCA. The club is most remembered for its home on the corner of Broadway and Holly West, perhaps the first women’s clubhouse to be built in Washington State. The Aftermath Club was the site of many teas, receptions and private parties until the club disbanded in June 2003, and the club property was acquired by Rob Westford. Now known as Broadway Hall, it continues to be available for gatherings and receptions.

The **New Whatcom Ladies Cooperative Society** was formed in October 1895, when the state was still under “the most severe economic stress” following the Panic of 1893. The women of that club were apparently a stimulating influence in progressive community activities, and the club soon became a branch of the Women’s Washington State Cooperative Society. “Patronize Home Industry” was their slogan, a forerunner of today’s “Buy Local” campaign.

The approximately 500 members spent much of their first two years trying to establish a flax growing industry in Whatcom County. Despite promising results from Dr. A.W. Thornton’s Ferndale farm, where he demonstrated that high quality flax fiber could be successfully grown in the area, efforts to develop a permanent industry did not succeed. In 1896, the society helped promote and establish the city’s first creamery, known as Ford’s Cooperative Creamery, at the corner of F and Astor Streets. Their efforts were especially appreciated following the financial hard times following the Panic when the mills were shut down and “no money was coming into the county from the outside.”<sup>6</sup>

The Ladies Cooperative Society’s greatest successes were in the improvement and enlargement of the city’s parks, notably Elizabeth Park with its band stand, Whatcom Falls Park, improved in cooperation with the Whatcom Falls Park Club, and Cornwall Park with its tulip drinking fountain. During the first year Frances Axtell was president with Mrs. Bertha Fischer and Mary (Mrs. Thomas) Slade as vice presidents. In the second year, leadership was provided by Sarah (Mrs. J.K.) Appleby as president with Ellen (Mrs. George W.) Dawson and Lavalette (Mrs. Lin H.) Hadley, vice presidents. When Frances Axtell went on to become one of two women elected to the Washington State Legislature in 1912, the state’s poet laureate Ella Higginson of Bellingham was her campaign manager.

These ladies were also businesswomen. In 1909 the society bought a share of the Stone & Webster Skagit interurban railway stock for \$82.50, which, Roth writes, yielded several semi-annual and quarterly dividends before they sold it back to the company in 1912 for \$102. The ladies felt so good about this transaction, Roth comments, that the “entire membership

took a day off and inspected the new electric interurban from end to end.”

The Society not only was formed of enterprising, active women, but it had as its goal “discussing and devising ways and means of cooperation, whereby the people of all classes might enjoy a greater degree of prosperity and happiness,” truly characteristic of “progressive community life.”<sup>7</sup>

The **Progressive Literary and Fraternal Club**, organized September 8, 1900 and known as the PLF Club, was a social club that aimed to provide reading rooms and give instruction for the “diffusion of scientific, artistic, musical or historical purposes.”<sup>8</sup> The PLF Club also had a clubhouse known as Garden Hall, built in 1904 at the corner of Garden and Holly streets. The club building is gone but was in same location as the present Garden Street Family Center. Among its early members were again Frances Axtell as well as Ida Agnes Baker and Catherine Montgomery, both Normal School teachers. The club gave financial aid to the YWCA and Travelers Aid Society and furnished a room in the YWCA building, among other civic activities.

Another early women’s club was the **Women’s Christian Temperance Union**, The first Whatcom County union was organized in 1883 with branches in Lynden and Blaine. Others followed in Fairhaven in 1889, in Sehome in 1890 and in Sumas in 1892. The WCTU stood for protection of the home; the prohibition of liquor and its attendant evils, the opium and tobacco traffics, gambling and brothels; for the equal right of all to hold and express opinions at home and publicly; for an eight-hour work day and a living wage.

Other groups included the Music Club, 1895, the forerunner of the Bellingham Women’s Music Club of which Frances Payne Larrabee was twice president; the various G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) auxiliaries beginning in the 1890s; several P.E.O. chapters, an international organization devoted primarily to educational opportunity for worthy girls begun in 1904; and the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1912.

It is interesting to note the interlocking relationships between the women, exemplified by the Monday Club, Aftermath Club and New Whatcom Ladies Cooperative Society leaders. The Hadley brothers, Hiram, Lin and Alonzo, were all local attorneys in the 1890s. At first, the firm was known as Slade, H.E. Hadley and L.H. Hadley with offices in the Slade Building. Mattie and Lavalette Hadley were sisters-in-law, while Mary Slade was the wife of the third partner.

Later the firm became Dorr, L.H. Hadley and A.M. Hadley; and Sarah Dorr was a friend of Mattie and Lavalette. Hiram E. Hadley went on to become a Washington State Supreme Court Justice, while Lin Hadley was elected a U.S. Representative and, with Lavalette, went to Washington, D.C. There she became an active member of the Congressional Wives Club. By 1910, the Dorr had moved to Seattle.

Proximity through neighborhoods was important as well. Clara Donovan lived at 1201 Garden St., Bertha Fischer at 727 Garden, Sarah Appleby at 519 Magnolia, Delia Crites at 1208 Garden, Frances Axtell at 413 E. Maple and Lavalette Hadley at 1475 Forest – all within a few blocks of each other. Moreover, since the husbands were professionals, there presumably would have been mutual interests in common.

These clubwomen, who were often members of several groups and organizations, and others like them provided a web of connections and support for a variety of community causes and interests.



Frances Axtell first won election in 1912, one of only two women in the Washington State Legislature. The other was Nina Jolidon Croake, a Progressive Party member from Tacoma. In 1922, Axtell ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination to the U.S. Senate.

*House of Representatives Group Photos, Washington State Archives.*





Members of the Aftermath Club dressed in period costume for the club's 54th anniversary in 1950. Alwina McCush is seated on the far right.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

## A Legacy of Leadership

### Frances Payne Larrabee

1867-1941

Since 2002, the YWCA Northwest Women's Hall of Fame, through its Legacy Award, has honored women from the early days of Whatcom County who exemplify the leadership that those in later years have embraced. They exhibited dedication, leadership, perseverance, innovation and talent that live on as an inspiration to women of today. It is fitting to pay tribute here to these women of early Whatcom County and their achievements. Frances Payne Larrabee was the first Legacy Award honoree. An accomplished musician as a young woman, she became a wife and mother, businesswoman, church and civic leader, and philanthropist whose contributions endure. She was a founding YWCA board member who, with her husband, C.X. Larrabee, built the association's landmark home on North Forest in 1915. A brief recounting of her many accomplishments is on page 42.



Whatcom Museum of History and Art.

### Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

*"They showed courage, dedication and innovation in ministering to the health of a region only just emerging from frontier status," Legacy Award Citation, 2003*

Sister Teresa Moran and Sister Stanislaus Tighe traveled from New Jersey in 1890 to establish the first hospital in Whatcom County. They raised funds by selling "hospital tickets" for \$10, entitling the bearer to a year's medical attention. In January 1891, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace opened their 30-bed hospital on the clear-cut hillside above Fairhaven at 16th and Adams. To finance a new 53-bed hospital, costing \$21,000 in 1901, sisters of the order traveled as far away as the Klondike, where they sold medical vouchers to gold miners. St. Joseph's underwent four significant expansions over the next 65 years and conducted a school of nursing from 1908 to 1963. It moved in 1966 to the north end of Ellis Street, where the legacy established by the Sister's of St. Joseph of Peace continues.



Sister Teresa Moran

Courtesy of St. Joseph Hospital and PeaceHealth.

BELLINGHAM YWCA

## Ella Rhodes Higginson

1861-1940

*"Her life bears witness to the changes and concerns affecting this community during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and documents the crucial role played by art and women in shaping the history of the Northwest," Legacy Award Citation, 2004*

In her poetry, short stories and magazine articles, Ella Higginson often celebrated this "most gloriously, marvelously beautiful part of the world," where she came in 1888 with her husband, the pharmacist Russell C. Higginson. She was a longstanding supporter of the State Normal School at Bellingham (now WWU) that was across the road from her Victorian home at 605 High Street. Ella Higginson also served as campaign manager for Frances C. Axtell, one of two women elected to the State Legislature in 1912, two years after Washington women gained the right to vote and eight years before women won the vote nationally. In 1931, Mrs. Higginson was crowned poet laureate of the Washington State Federation of Women's Clubs. Adopting Higginson's "Four Leaf Clover" as their official verse, the four-leaf clover itself became the federation's insignia.

Whatcom Museum  
of History & Art.

## Ida Agnes Baker

1856 – 1921

*"May her abundant life inspire us to deeper service." Bellingham Normal School President D.W. Nash at her 1921 campus memorial. Legacy Award Citation, 2008*

Educator, writer and early environmentalist, Ida Agnes Baker, was a leader in the suffrage movement that achieved the vote for Washington women in 1910, a decade before the nation as a whole. Her commitment began at Central Iowa College in her native state where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree, rare in her time. "One day, I saw a squad of college boys going down to vote," she recalled. "I loved my country, but when I would be 21, I would not be allowed to vote. The thought gave me actual physical pain..." In 1899, she became one of nine founding faculty members at what is now Western Washington University. There, she combined her lifelong love of nature with her commitment to a complete education for women that included what, today, would be called environmental studies. Struck by a streetcar while walking home from a League of Women Voters meeting, she died January 29, 1921.

Wilson Library Special Collections,  
Western Washington University.

## Helen Loggie

1895-1976

*"Her art expresses the spirit of our land, with skill and grace. We salute her for capturing that essence in her time and for generations to come," Legacy Award Citation, 2006*

A sawmill owner's daughter, Helen Loggie graduated from Whatcom High School and attended Smith College in Massachusetts before studying painting in New York City. She traveled widely in Europe, studying old masters in France and Italy. Yet it was the Pacific Northwest – and etching rather than oils – that gave her a mode of expression so vivid that, as one critic exclaimed, "She gave life to trees." Loggie exhibited her work in New York, Washington, D.C., and throughout Europe. Numerous institutions have collections of her etchings, including the Library of Congress, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the British Museum, Western Washington University and the Whatcom Museum of History & Art.



Western Gallery,  
Western Washington  
University.

## Mabel Zoe Wilson

1878-1964

*"Why do we do this? ...because we believe a life without books is a meager existence," Mabel Zoe Wilson, 1912. Legacy Award Citation, 2007*

When she arrived on campus in 1902, the Whatcom State Normal School's "library" had 500 books and a pile of magazines tucked into the corner of now "Old" Main. Her salary was \$50 a month, \$10 more than the janitor and half that of her male colleagues. A graduate of Ohio State University and the School of Library Science in Albany, New York, Wilson introduced the Normal's collection to the Dewey Decimal System and classified it by both American Library Association and Library of Congress codes. Through her efforts, a classic library rose in 1928. She was a founder of the Washington Library Association and led expansion of library service throughout the state, including rural libraries. Retiring in 1947, she learned Braille to continue reading. Western Washington University's library was named in Wilson's honor just six weeks prior to her death in 1964.



Wilson Library Special Collections,  
Western Washington University.

## Women of the Aftermath Club

1895-2003

*"They were a major influence on community life for 107 years,"* Legacy Award Citation, 2005

The Aftermath Club, a women's literary circle, was started in 1895 by neighbors on Garden Street. In 1904-05, members had the first women's clubhouse in Washington State constructed at W. Holly and Broadway. For decades, the clubhouse was a center of Bellingham's social and cultural activities. The reading club evolved into a philanthropic organization and Aftermath women worked with the Red Cross during both World Wars, provided college scholarships and supported, among others, the YWCA, Mt. Baker Theatre, Bellingham Theater Guild and Whatcom Museum. In 1950, Mrs. Alwina Korthauer McCush was honored for more than a half-century of membership in the Aftermath Club. She'd also served as the first president of the Bellingham YWCA during its formation back in 1907. The Aftermath Club disbanded in 2003. The former clubhouse, now called Broadway Hall, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

A founding member of the Aftermath Club, Delia Crites is shown here with grandson Jack Carver in 1920. Crites' daughter, Gertrude, was society editor at the *Bellingham Herald* and married to Coston Carver, the editor. Jack was the newspaper's photographer for many decades. His aunt, Jessie Carver, taught swimming at the YWCA.

*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*





## YWCA: From Britain to Bellingham

In 1855, the Crimean War between England, Turkey and Russia was ending. Florence Nightingale and 38 nurses had set up hospitals for English soldiers on the battlegrounds, the first time women had served at the battlefield. Now with the war over, they were returning home to England. At the same time, the Industrial Revolution, which replaced small cottage industries and home-based handwork with machine-made goods, was encouraging young women to leave farms and rural areas for work in factories and growing cities. Opportunities for working women were especially strong in textile mills and clothing manufacture. All these women needed “suitable” housing.

In London, two groups of women had been meeting. Miss Emma Robarts led a growing prayer union devoted to peace; Mary Jane Kinnaird organized an activist group to focus on issues such as job training, the nurses without places to stay, and workers’ housing. In 1855, the two groups joined to become the Young Women’s Christian Association, combining religious dedication with practical social action – a hallmark of the YWCA movement from the start.

A similar industrial revolution in the United States, brought not only new working opportunities to farm workers and the waves of immigrants, but the new wealth resulted in an expanding middle and upper-middle class. With increased leisure time, these women looked to new activities to improve their minds and their communities. Safe housing, appropriate employment, unionization and labor issues, sanitation and public health problems, especially in crowded city tenements, and exploitation of women and child labor were among the many civic causes that commanded attention by high-minded women of the middle and upper-middle classes.

Spurred on by these developments, the YWCA movement spread quickly to New York City in 1858 and grew rapidly, especially after the Civil War. Known as the Ladies Christian Association in New York, the organization first used the name Young Women’s Christian Association in Boston in 1859. Groups in big cities tended to be action-oriented. Other women, chiefly in the towns of the mid-West, organized into prayer groups and called themselves the American Committee of Women’s Christian Associations. The YWCA was a bridge between the earlier “Christian

values” church groups and the more secular “social issues” organizations that were forming to address emerging civic problems.

By 1860, the first YWCA boarding houses for female students, teachers and factory workers were established in New York City and Boston. The Boston group was also interested in women’s health. Recognizing that the young girls were working long hours, had no time for recreation, and lacked the physical exercise of the farms, the Boston YWCA installed pulley weights on the backs of residents’ closet doors and soon started gyms and swimming pools. Subsequent YWCA’s strived to have one facility or the other, or both.

The first day nursery in the United States began with the Philadelphia YWCA in 1864, followed by the first Travelers Aid program in Boston in 1866 and, “in the face of unreasonable prejudice and misinterpretation,” the first home for unwed mothers, known as “The Retreat,” in Cleveland in 1869. Pioneering in job training, the YWCA began offering typing (formerly considered a man’s occupation), sewing machine classes and employment bureaus in the early 1870s.<sup>1</sup>

By 1873, the YWCA concept, based on providing safe shelter and encouraging “women to help women,” spread to college campuses, where women students needed a safe haven and a place to share their ideas and concerns about issues then facing women. The first student YWCA was founded at Normal University in Normal, Illinois in 1873. When New Whatcom Normal School in Bellingham opened its doors in 1899, its first club was the YWCA. Nationwide, a growing number of individually run city associations and campus clubs developed, which were united to form the national YWCA in 1906. Incorporated in New York, the organization established a national board to conduct common business and asked Grace Hoadley Dodge, a philanthropist, a member of the Women’s Labor Council and a founder of Columbia Teachers’ College, to be the first president.

Meanwhile, the YWCA movement was expanding internationally as well. Recognizing the commonality of women’s needs and issues, the United States American Committee, England, Sweden and Norway joined together to found the World YWCA in 1894.



New Whatcom Normal School's Main building with Kibbe Pond, 1909. J. W. Sandison.  
*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

## New Whatcom Normal School Leads the Way

The Young Women's Christian Association took root in what was to become the town of Bellingham with the opening of New Whatcom Normal School<sup>1</sup>, now Western Washington University, in the fall of 1899. According to the December 1899 *Messenger*, the Normal School newspaper, the YWCA was the school's first organized club, with devotions held every Friday from 12:30 to 1 p.m. "Those outside of the school who are interested in the work are cordially invited to visit us," the YWCA club report in the newspaper announced.

The first president was Pauline Jacobs, a 26-year-old woman born in New York City, whose parents moved to Kansas and then the Puget Sound area where she attended public school in Lynden. Vice president was Margaret Clark, born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin and the first graduate of Everett High School. Recording secretary was Mildred Mackey. Treasurer was Florence Griffith, born in Eureka Springs, Arkansas and educated in New Whatcom. All but Mackey were in the school's first graduating class of 1900. Faculty member Miss Belle Sperry acted as advisor to the club.

Bible studies and devotions were the club's early focus. The March 1900 *Messenger* notes that "the YWCA this quarter has been making a study of Proverbs. The weekly devotional meetings are a source of much spiritual good to all who attend."

By 1900, the club had grown to 70 members and had "adopted" a little girl in India, the budding of the local organization's ongoing interest in the national YWCA's international affairs and outreach programs. On May 4, 1900 a public entertainment including an address on "The Object and Growth of the YWCA" by Rev. W. A. Mackey expanded attendees' knowledge of the organization's work. Games, ice cream and cake followed the program, with \$10 in proceeds added to money raised by subscription to support the child in India.

The first Normal School graduating class, 1900: Front row l-r: Margaret J. Clark (YWCA Club vice-president), Clara Norman, Hattie B. Thompson, Kate M. Schutt, Florence M. Griffith (YWCA Club treasurer); Back row l-r: Pauline Jacobs (YWCA Club president), Ruth P. Pratt, Emma Mythaler.

*Wilson Library Special Collections,  
Western Washington University.*



Club members were involved in the YWCA chapter conferences and conventions held for students in Seattle and elsewhere. In May 1900, the *Messenger* recorded, Miss Jacobs and Miss Woodin, the incoming president, were sent as delegates to a convention in Seattle, a significant journey.<sup>2</sup> They returned with “enthusiastic reports, proud of the fact that our association compares very favorably with any in this district.” Miss Jacobs also attended a convention of all the Pacific Coast associations in Capitola, California.

By 1901, YWCA meetings were also being held at local churches with Normal School students often serving as speakers.

In that same year, young Normal School women arranged with Principal Edward Mathes to meet all students arriving in the city by train or boat if these travelers notified the school of the “exact train or boat upon which they will reach the city.” Partly hospitality, this also reflected a desire to shelter new arrivals from the rougher elements of the town and was a forerunner to the Travelers Aid program run by the Bellingham YWCA until after World War I.

On campus, the YWCA women arranged social activities and receptions for students and friends of the Normal School, operated a cafeteria and continued to appreciate the weekly devotional meetings and Bible classes, which the women felt strengthened and deepened their spiritual life. By October 1906, the club was making extensive preparations to host a statewide YWCA convention on campus on November 1 through 4.



New Whatcom Normal School YWCA members, 1911.

*Galen Biery Collection, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

## Bellingham YWCA Is Founded in 1907

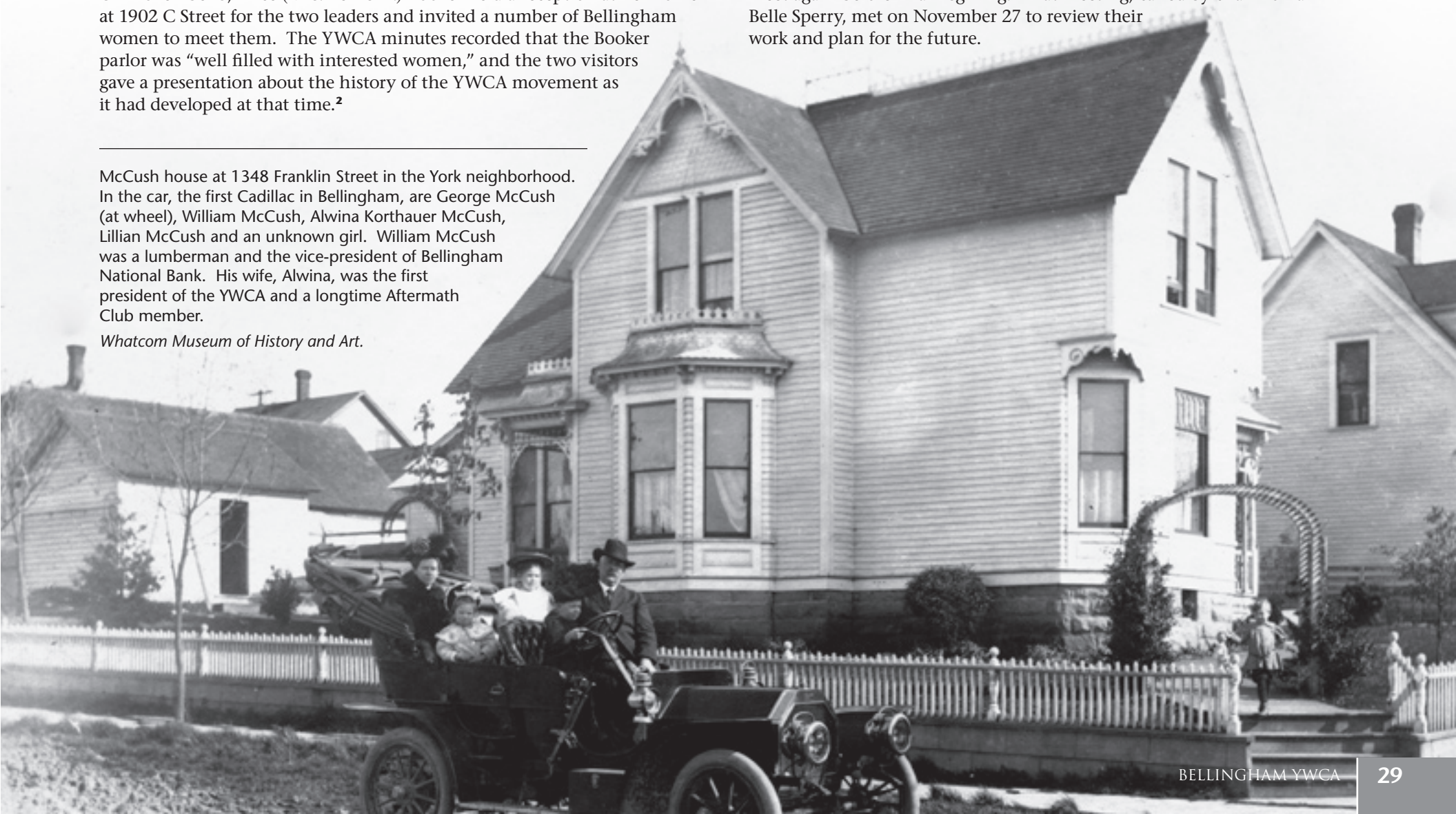
The November 1906 campus convention was to be momentous for the founding of the Bellingham YWCA. Among the leaders of the convention were Miss Gage, a state association officer, and a Miss Wilson.<sup>1</sup> On November 5, Alice (Mrs. Lewis H.) Booker held a reception at her home at 1902 C Street for the two leaders and invited a number of Bellingham women to meet them. The YWCA minutes recorded that the Booker parlor was “well filled with interested women,” and the two visitors gave a presentation about the history of the YWCA movement as it had developed at that time.<sup>2</sup>

Those present eagerly asked questions, which the visitors answered directly. After discussion, someone proposed that Bellingham should have a formally organized YWCA. Before the group adjourned, they agreed to meet again before Thanksgiving. That meeting, called by chairwoman Belle Sperry, met on November 27 to review their work and plan for the future.

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McCush house at 1348 Franklin Street in the York neighborhood. In the car, the first Cadillac in Bellingham, are George McCush (at wheel), William McCush, Alwina Korthauer McCush, Lillian McCush and an unknown girl. William McCush was a lumberman and the vice-president of Bellingham National Bank. His wife, Alwina, was the first president of the YWCA and a longtime Aftermath Club member.

*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



In January 1907, the organizing leaders wrote to the state Association president, Mrs. Allen, asking Miss Gage return to Bellingham to “instruct us.” Miss Gage was unable to come, but a Mrs. Fassett gave a talk on March 8, urging much prayer and commending the older women for their interest. However, she suggested, since the YWCA was designed to help younger women and girls, the organizers should involve the Normal School women and those employed in downtown stores and offices. The role of older women should be resource persons to assist. Mrs. Fassett suggested beginning with a summer camping program for girls on vacation from work or school.

The local women met with the Normal School students each Monday evening until the end of the school term. At the meetings they informally discussed goals for the young women, followed by an entertainment. Finally, on May 27, 1907 at the end of the school year, they met in a room rented from the Holly Street Young Men’s Christian Association for \$1 for the evening, and all women present voted to organize a temporary association and elect officers. Miss Gage attended this meeting and welcomed the group to the state and national YWCA movement.

At this gathering, Alwina (Mrs. William) McCush was elected temporary president; Belle Sperry, vice president; Lucretia (Mrs. Henry C.) Beach, secretary and Mrs. W.A. Montgomery, treasurer. After the election of officers, the women asked Miss Gage to return the following week and adjourned.

The fledging organization’s first project was to establish the summer camping program for young girls. After the May meeting, Alwina McCush obtained free tents from the Columbia Improvement Company and persuaded George Jenkins, owner of Ramona Park summer resort at Lake Whatcom, to allow the YWCA to pitch their tents on his property. Members, friends and city merchants donated furnishings and camp supplies. Campers were to pay \$3.50 a week to hire a cook and a matron to manage the camp. The camp opened on July 20 and closed for the summer on August 3. Despite good intentions, apparently the camp was not as popular as had been hoped. The sponsors had not involved prospective

campers in the planning, and the young women were not interested in being isolated at the lake without social activities involving young men. The cook and matron left shortly, and Miss Jessie Hall and Belle Sperry volunteered to help out.

The YWCA sent two leaders to the Northwest YWCA conference held in August at Seaside, Oregon to find out how other leaders handled their camping programs. Upon their return, the two leaders reported that lack of finances was the major problem.

With the opening of the Normal School’s fall term in September, Miss Gage returned for a meeting to appoint committees, especially a Ways and Means committee charged with the responsibility to raise funds. She told the members present that they needed 400 dues-paying members who would contribute \$2.50 each year to fund future programs. In addition, they should solicit \$500 from the business community. When they had \$1,500 in the bank, they could hire an executive director and pay for a modest program.

At the next meeting, held at Alwina McCush’s home, the reports were encouraging. Despite yet-another severe national financial downturn known as the “Panic of 1907,” volunteer members had raised \$300 in dues, and by the end of November this amount had become \$800. Membership dues continued to come in and by December, the goal of \$1,000 had been reached. This was a remarkable achievement, especially in light of the financial panic that swept the country.

Miss Gage stayed on to help the organizers raise the additional \$500 from the business community. She spoke with the Ministerial Association and received time in regular church services to tell the YWCA story and ask for offerings. She met with the Library Board, which was building a new Carnegie Library at the corner of Commercial and Magnolia Streets. She talked with the Chamber of Commerce Board and met with local businessmen and storekeepers. Before she left the city, she had raised \$500 in cash and pledges. The Bellingham YWCA was now ready to elect permanent officers and develop their programs.

The final organizing meeting took place on December 17, 1907. It was to be at the Aftermath Club, but when the leaders arrived, they found the building locked with no lights visible. Mrs. John Gibson, the wife of the Broadway United Presbyterian Church minister, whose home was nearby at 1505 Broadway, invited the 32 women present to her house, and the meeting began.

The Rooms Committee reported that Miss Gage's meetings with the Library Board had resulted in the YWCA's being able to rent the basement of the nearly completed downtown library building. The next task was to adopt a constitution. The acting president presented a model constitution sent as a suggestion from national headquarters, which the women present quickly adopted with no changes.

Then they chose 15 members to serve on the board of directors: Mrs. J. L. Shockey, Mary (Mrs. Robert) Welch, Mrs. Emelina L. Cole, Mrs. Elizabeth E. Pettibone and Mrs. Rendebeck for one-year terms; Mrs. Henry Byron, Mrs. A.S. Cole, Maggie (Mrs. B.M.) Easterbrook, Mrs. John Gibson, and Cora ( Mrs. Clarence.C.) Fisher for three-year terms; and Addie (Mrs. W.D.) Kirkpatrick, Alwina McCush, Mrs. May Mason, Frances P. Larrabee and Mrs. Hattie B. Stephen for unspecified terms.

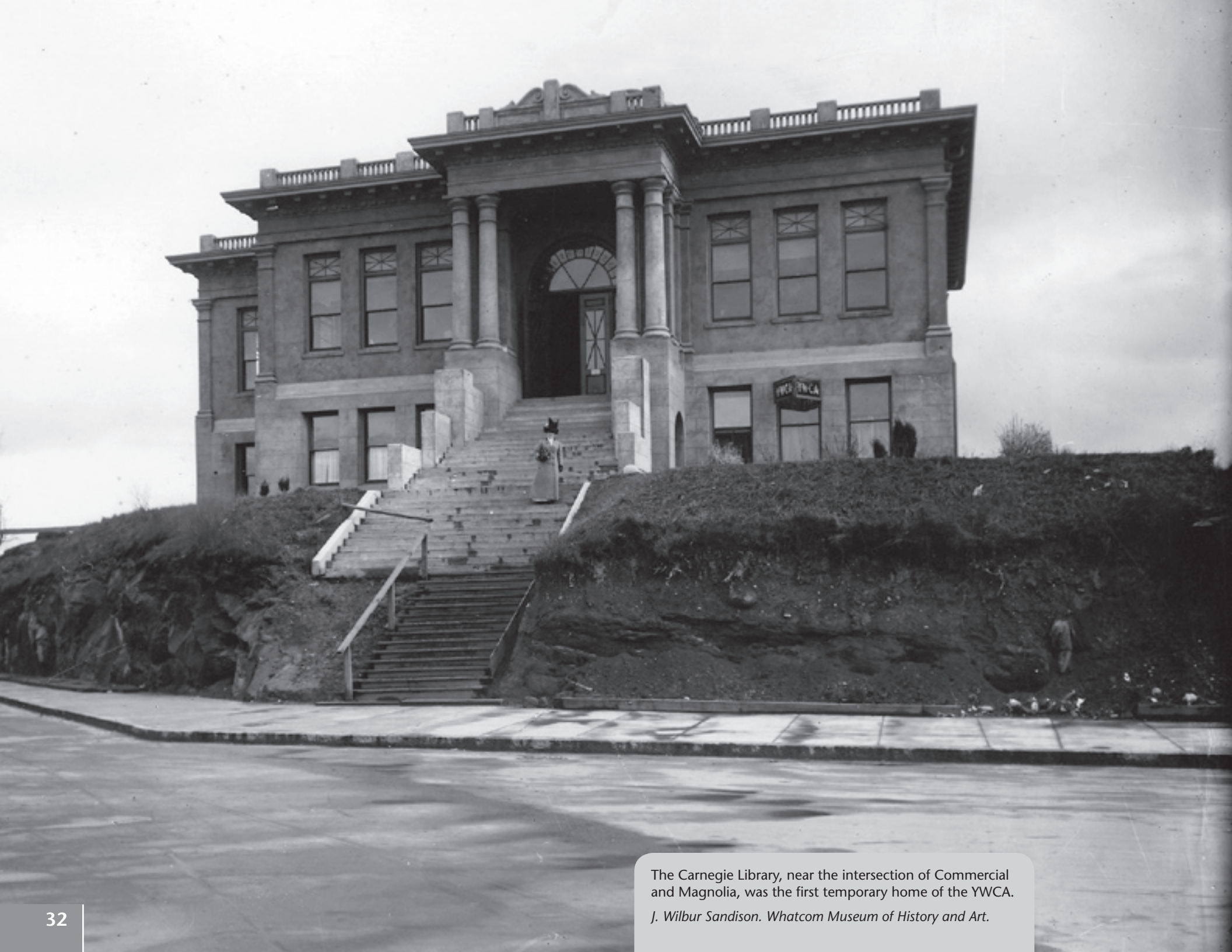
The next week the new board of directors met and, after reading a Bible passage and conducting a "circle of prayer," selected Addie Kirkpatrick as the new president of the officially organized YWCA. Frances Larrabee was elected vice-president; Lucretia Beach, secretary; and Mrs. A.S. Cole, treasurer. They adopted appropriate by-laws to the constitution and voted to deposit their funds in the Bellingham National Bank, whose president was Victor Roeder, son of Bellingham's co-founder Henry Roeder.

To illustrate the mettle of these leaders, a year later, when Victor Roeder refused to donate any money for their programs, the board countered his refusal by telling him if he didn't help them they would transfer their money to another bank. Roeder did not change his mind, and they voted to transfer their funds to the Northwestern Bank and to the First National Bank. These women were wives and mothers, but as clubwomen and leaders, they were not afraid to confront opposition if necessary to achieve their goals.



Belle Sperry taught English at New Whatcom Normal School and was faculty advisor to the school's YWCA Club.

*Wilson Library Special Collections,  
Western Washington University.*



The Carnegie Library, near the intersection of Commercial and Magnolia, was the first temporary home of the YWCA.  
*J. Wilbur Sandison. Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



## The Carnegie Library and Tresize House

On Valentine's Day in February 1908, the basement of the new downtown Carnegie Library became the Bellingham YWCA's first home. It included a cafeteria, a gymnasium, a lounge and restrooms. Donations of furnishings and supplies came from The Fair department store, Morse Hardware, Thiel and Welter Furniture, the Diamond Palace Jewelry Store, local physicians, the gas company and the Aftermath Club, among others.

In addition to the recreational and cultural activities offered, the affordable YWCA cafeteria was popular with a growing number of young women working downtown or studying at the Normal School. In the first month, more than 1,000 meals were served at an average cost of 18 cents apiece. The cafeteria proved so popular with young downtown women for its quality of cooking and low price that some of the young businessmen of the city requested permission to eat their lunches there. Not anticipating this development, which would have taxed the room's limited facilities, the YWCA board responded it would consider the request later.

Later never came.

On May 21, 1908, seven battleships from the U.S. Navy's "Great White Fleet" arrived in Bellingham, with parades and festivities celebrating their arrival. Tens of thousands of people thronged into the city to view the vessels, visit with the sailors and enjoy the carnival atmosphere. Fifteen hundred visitors used the YWCA facilities that month, largely because of the three-day social event.

Finding funds to support expanding activities and the space to provide services, especially housing, was a constant concern for those early YWCA board members. In those days, it was considered worrisome, unconventional, even immoral, for a woman to be away from her family home, on her own, seeking a life for herself. To help these women bridge the gap until they were settled, the board directors left the Carnegie Library location in 1913 and leased the Tresize home at 1214 Commercial Street. The front rooms were rented to working girls for \$25 a month with board, while the back rooms were let for whatever the young women could afford.

Other programs continued to grow. The YMCA,<sup>1</sup> only a few blocks east on Holly Street, had a small swimming pool, which the YWCA rented for its members and residents. In 1913, the board developed a summer camping program with camps on Lummi Island and Lake Whatcom.

The Tresize House, the second home of the YWCA, is the second house from the right. Whatcom Museum of History and Art.  
*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*





Typists Laura Eklund (left) and her sister Ella (right) at work in the Comptroller's Office in Bellingham City Hall, now the Whatcom Museum of History and Art. Ella was a graduate of Wilson's Business College.

*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

## Employment Bureau

Among one of the most successful programs was an employment bureau. Nationally and locally, the YWCA was firmly committed to helping women find employment and safe housing. At the turn of the century, young women were migrating to the cities to find work. The YWCA assisted them in securing employment and housing as well as providing for their moral well-being.

In Bellingham, unskilled women often worked as “house girls” (domestic servants) and in commercial laundries, though the Pacific American Fisheries cannery in Fairhaven was the largest employer of female workers. During the height of the fishing season, as many as 600 women were hired to fill cans by hand with salmon. The average wage was \$1.25 a day for a ten-hour day, which was considered good pay. The YWCA held a noon-time Bible study class with these workers as well as offered recreational and educational opportunities for their day off. In 1913, more than 500 women used the YWCA’s employment service and the organization found jobs for 425 of them, many as sales clerks or housemaids of various kinds.

In addition to helping with jobs and housing, the YWCA supported “wholesome” lives for working women. The organization offered recreational activities, including exercise programs and a summer camp for girls and young women. It also provided cultural and educational opportunities, among them a choral singing group, Bible study class, literary societies and a girls club. There were noon meetings for women employees in warehouses, laundries, the Pacific American Fisheries cannery and the candy factory, all places where largely unskilled young women were working at the time. And there were social gatherings for “foreign girls,” recent immigrants mostly from western Europe.

(Top) Women hand-filling cans with salmon at Pacific American Fisheries, 1906.

*Asahel Curtis, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

(Bottom) Stenographer Molla Moldren takes dictation from Ray Packer, a lawyer and manager of the Bellingham Creditors Adjustment Company, in his office in the Pike Building, 1909. Molla was also a Wilson’s Business College graduate.

*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*





## Travelers Aid

The crowds coming to Bellingham during the “Great White Fleet” visit of May 1908 pointed to an unmet need. Among the estimated tens of thousands of visitors pouring in for the three-day event were many women who had “foolishly made no arrangements for either food or lodging.”<sup>1</sup> The YWCA set up an informal Travelers Aid service for people who needed information about places to eat or stay.

This service proved so popular that the board decided to make it a part of the YWCA’s service to the community, a considerable expansion of the service provided to incoming Normal School students by the school’s YWCA club. Miss Ella Belyea was hired to meet all trains and steamships bringing visitors to Bellingham.

In 1911, records showed that in eight months the YWCA staff had met 1,338 trains at Bellingham’s three stations, dozens of ships at the docks and had found 293 persons in need of assistance. Jobs were found for 150 young women and safe housing for 200. With support from businesses and the community as well as members, the local Travelers Aid program continued until well after World War I.

Nationally and locally, the threat of women being forced into prostitution prompted development of the Travelers Aid program. After the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, an estimated 700 girls had disappeared, many of whom were suspected of having fallen prey to sexual exploitation. The national YWCA was determined to prevent this if possible and by the mid-1890s had organized efforts to help traveling women.

(Top) Bellingham and Fairhaven had their share of brothels through many decades of the city’s history. One such house, Mae Wright’s, is the black house in the center of the photo.

*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



(Bottom) Train depot on Railroad Avenue, circa 1905.

*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



The steamship *Kulshan* at Citizens Dock  
Whatcom Museum of History and Art.



Reports tell of children traveling alone without supervision or money, of sick or foreign women who were particularly vulnerable to answering “help wanted” advertising or even responding directly to procurers. Some desperate women agreed to marry men who accosted them and whom they had never seen before. Railroad stations were favorite sites for those who profited from this sexual exploitation.<sup>2</sup> Since women could make more money in this activity than in most of the low-paying jobs then available, the economic motivation for that life existed. With a host of brothels in downtown Bellingham and Fairhaven and a red light district on the waterfront, the city was far from immune to these problems and temptations.

Still, raising funds to pay staff and keep programs going remained a challenge. So did finding space for housing and for providing an increasing number of programs. The lease on the Tresize House expired in October 1913, and although the board had first option to purchase, they did not want to make payments on a property that was inadequate and would become more so in the future. The YWCA board stood at a crossroads. They appointed a Housing Committee to explore the possibilities.

A woman holding a Bellingham brochure is being greeted at the train station by an older woman, possibly a Travelers Aide, circa 1920.

*J.W. Sandison, Galen Biery Collection, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

## The Larrabees Build the YWCA a Home

On July 21, 1914, a meeting was called by the YWCA board to discuss finding a permanent home. Frances Larrabee was in attendance as was Arta Lawrence, a member of the Housing Committee and a Normal School student. Miss Lawrence later recalled what happened next:

“Mrs. Larrabee sat quietly on one side of the conference table listening attentively as the meeting opened, and the preliminary business proceeded. As was her usual habit, she was dressed in an unostentatious business suit. On the floor beside her chair was a plain brown leather valise.”

When discussion began on the housing situation, she asked to be recognized by the president.

“Speaking of the building,” Mrs. Larrabee said, “I have something I’d like to present.” She reached into her satchel and pulled out a set of architectural plans that she and her husband, C. X. Larrabee, had obtained from Carl F. Gould, the leading architect in the state. “Now, if these plans meet with the approval of the membership, the Larrabees would like to build it for you” she announced.<sup>1</sup>

This was an uncommon act of generosity even for this civic-minded couple. The building was erected on land at Forest and Maple Streets donated by the Larrabees and cost \$50,000 to build.<sup>2</sup> Although C.X. Larrabee died suddenly of a heart attack less than two months after the plans were presented, Frances Larrabee went ahead with the building. She and her daughter, Mary, were honored as the donors at its dedication on March 21, 1915, at which 450 people were estimated to be present.<sup>3</sup>

Designed in the Georgian Revival style, the new YWCA home had two lounges, a kitchen, a lovely ballroom which doubled as a dining and meeting room, three floors of residents’ rooms and, in the basement, a natatorium – or swimming pool.

Many businesses, women’s clubs, churches and friends helped to furnish the rooms. Among those were the Aftermath Club, Business Women’s Club, the PLF Club, Camp Fire Girls, the Normal School YWCA, Bellingham National Bank, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church Parish, Northwestern State Bank, and YWCA members Clara Donovan, Miss Ruth Kirkpatrick, and Pearl (Mrs. Frank) Deerwester.

Of the new brick building, the *Bellingham Herald* wrote in 1915: “Established in their beautiful new building and surrounded with all the comforts and conveniences of home, the members of the Young

YWCA lobby and, though the French doors, the spacious ballroom, 1915.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*





Women's Christian Association feel now that they hold a high place in the real active life of the community. Encouraged with these benefits, the organization in the last year has reached out and broadened its work and activity until there is no other YWCA in the Northwest better equipped to carry out what is sure to be a fine work . . . Coming as a gift from one of the city's most interested workers for all that tends to the public good, this fine property is the admiration and envy of all visitors to Bellingham . . . As Bellingham grows, and as its various institutions backed by the public take a greater part in such growth, undoubtedly the YWCA will be found at the front."

The rise of the YWCA in the United States led to a new building typology in America architecture: a recreational and residential center with an emphasis on Bible studies and moral living for young women. Meeting rooms, dining areas and residential rooms were standard features of YWCA buildings throughout the country. In addition, the organization had joined a growing movement in promoting the benefits of physical activity, and the YWCAs tried to include a swimming pool or gymnasium if possible.

The Bellingham YWCA met all of these criteria. Its ballroom was cafeteria, recreation and social hall; women felt comfortable swimming in the lower-level "natatorium;" the two main-floor lounges were available for gatherings of residents and women's club meetings. The three upper floors provided safe, comfortable and affordable housing for young women attending school, seeking employment or visiting the community.

The establishment of a permanent home for the YWCA not only provided a sense of pride for the members and the community, but it also contributed to the long-term stability of the organization. Placed on the National Historic Register in 1979, the Bellingham YWCA has been at the center of women's community life for most of a century.

Four well-dressed women, possibly the first residents, stand on the front steps of the newly completed YWCA building, 1915.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*





The new YWCA home at Forest and Maple Streets, 1915.  
*Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

# Frances Payne Larrabee

Frances Payne Larrabee arrived in Fairhaven in August 1892 as the bride of Charles X. Larrabee, who had come to Bellingham two years earlier. Born January 15, 1867 in Missouri to Benjamin and Adelia Payne, she excelled in music at the Mary Institute in St. Louis and the New England Conservatory of Music and spent a year in Berlin studying with Oscar Reif.

She and Charles X. Larrabee met in Boston in 1890 when he was there on business and she was visiting friends with her mother. An early investor in the West, Charles Larrabee had banking, mining, ranching and timber holdings in Washington, Oregon and Montana.

Frances and Charles had four children, Charles Francis, 1895; Edward (Ned), 1897; Mary Adele, 1902; and Benjamin Howard, 1906. They lived

and raised their children in the Fairhaven Hotel, until Secelechel, now Lairmont Manor, was built in 1915, after Charles' death.

She was not only a philanthropist and clubwoman, but she was also a keen businesswoman. She was one of five trustees of the Pacific Realty Company, into which the family businesses were incorporated in 1900; the other trustees were C.X. Larrabee, Cyrus Gates, Burton W. Huntoon and E.S. McCord. When she donated land for Larrabee State Park in 1915, she signed the papers as President of the Pacific Realty Company. Twenty-two years later, when she and her son, Charles Francis, donated 1500 more acres to enlarge the park, she still was president of the company.

Two months after her arrival in Fairhaven, Frances began helping the community by founding the Bellingham Bay Home for Children, a refuge for homeless children. A gifted leader and interested in Progressive Era social issues, she used the opportunities presented to her by women's clubs to exercise her talents. She was a leading member, and often president, of a number of clubs, including the Aftermath and Monday Clubs, Bellingham Women's Music Club, Daughters of the American Revolution, and 20th Century Club. A leader and benefactor at St. James Presbyterian Church, she was elected treasurer in 1917; she suggested a new building and donated four lots on which to build it. However, she is most remembered for her leadership and support of the YWCA. She was a founding member in 1907 and served on the board until her death in June 1941.

After her death, the *Bellingham Herald* eulogized her in a front page story, stating that, "Probably no other woman in the Northwest worked more diligently and consistently for the civic and general good than Mrs. Larrabee."<sup>1</sup>

A hand-written tribute in the Monday Club minutes reminded members that France Payne Larrabee had been involved with civic, church, philanthropic and clubwomen interests since her arrival in Fairhaven in 1892.<sup>2</sup>

Frances Larrabee and son Edward, Nov. 1897, by B.B. Dobbs  
*Edward Larrabee Collection, Whatcom Museum of History & Art.*



## The 'Teens and Twenties

With a stable home, the YWCA was able to expand its activities. By the end of 1915, the YWCA's Travelers Aid worker had met "two thousand plus" trains and steamships of the "mosquito fleet"<sup>1</sup> that came to Bellingham. As many as 700 people, the worker reported, had needed assistance. Although the focus was on young women arrivals, anyone who needed help received it. By the time the new building had opened, taxi drivers, policemen, baggage transfer workers at the train station and steamship officials were regularly referring travelers to the YWCA's most visible activity.

During World War I, the national YWCA organized the Hostess Girls, a forerunner of the USO of which the association was a founding member during World War II. Young, unmarried YWCA women were asked to visit military bases such as Fort Lewis in Washington to provide wholesome entertainment to the "boys" in the service. Playing checkers and organizing dances were popular activities.

During the post-war "Flapper Era," the sedate churchwomen of the YWCA might have been happy to wear something more comfortable than their corsets and petticoats but took a dim view of very short skirts and heavy makeup. A 1920 headline, "YWCA Opposes Extreme in Dress," greeted the association's support of a movement started at Whatcom High School against "excessive use of powder, rouge, lipstick and extreme styles of dress." It's one of the few instances in the records of the time in which they spoke out, as an organization, on such an issue.

By the 1920s, the YWCA was well-established in the Bellingham community. The 1922 fund-raising campaign, by then an annual event, had as its slogan "For our girls, For our city" and asked the community to "Stand by the Girlhood of Bellingham." Its goal was \$7,000. Together with the Campfire Girls, the YMCA and the Boy Scouts, the YWCA was known as a "character-building" organization. The 1922 fund-raising advertisement proclaimed the benefits of the YWCA's health, safety, educational, recreational and residence programs to Bellingham "girls" and to the community.

The 1922 fund-raising campaign poster.

*YWCA Collection,  
WWU Center for  
Pacific NW Studies.*

**Y. W. C. A.**  
BUDGET CAMPAIGN—FEB. 13-20  
"FOR OUR GIRLS—FOR OUR CITY"

Girls are everywhere in our community life today—doing their share of its work, bearing their share of its responsibility, taking part in every worth while activity.

They, therefore, merit their share of its resources for recreation, companionship, self-improvement.

The Y. W. C. A. is a community center for girls—with a friendly welcome for girls of all ages and all creeds—ready to help them solve their problems and meet their needs at all times.

An investment for our girlhood will bring its returns to you in a happier, efficient, and more self-reliant body of young women in our home and business world.

**Will You Help Make These Possibilities a Reality?**

Stand by the Girlhood of Bellingham and have your gift ready when we come to you this week.

This space donated by the Bellingham National Bank

**Y. W. C. A. BUDGET CAMPAIGN, \$7,000  
FEBRUARY 13-20**

**Y.W.C.A.**

FOR OUR GIRLS      FOR OUR CITY

**THE Y. W. C. A. OFFERS THE BEST INVESTMENT  
IN THE WORLD**

SAFETY for our girls  
HEALTH for our girls  
EDUCATION for our girls  
RECREATION for our girls  
A HOME for our girls

**WHAT WILL YOU INVEST FOR OUR BELLINGHAM  
GIRLS? HAVE YOUR GIFT READY WHEN THEY  
CALL ON YOU.**

**FIRST NATIONAL BANK**



Red Cross life-saving classes were a mainstay in the YWCA's swimming pool by the 1920s. The high-flying diver is Miss Clark, a Bellingham High School teacher.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

When the swimming pool opened for use in April 1915, it at once became the place where Bellingham girls and boys learned to swim, and women were comfortable swimming, too. Red Cross Life-saving classes gave certifications to hundreds of swimmers. A *Whatcom Reveille* article in 1926 noted that more than 200 Bellingham women and girls were enjoying the YWCA pool. Weekly swim classes enrolled 125 people, taught by Anita Howard, an instructor at the Normal School and Red Cross. According to Mrs. Howard, “the children are particularly adept at learning to swim, and the greatest difficulty in teaching them is that the little girls are continually going into deep water.”<sup>2</sup>

A national YWCA endeavor, the Girl Reserves program for ages 12 to 18 was formed during World War I to assist the war effort. After World War II, the Girl Reserves program evolved into Y-Teens, a popular program that continued into the 1970s. Generations of young girls shaped their lives according to the Girl Reserves ideals.



(Top) Girl Reserves gathered at a banquet held in 1919.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

(Bottom) YWCA members march down Holly Street in the 1925 Tulip Parade. The float's theme acknowledged the organization's values of health and happiness as well as the chief Whatcom County industries: lumbering, fishing, dairying and poultry.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*





## Girl Reserves Credo

*As a Girl Reserve  
I will try to be  
Gracious in manner  
Impartial in judgment  
Ready for service  
Loyal to friends*

*Reaching toward the best  
Ernest in purpose  
Seeing the beautiful  
Eager for knowledge*

*Reverent to God  
Victorious over self  
Ever dependable  
Sincere at all times*

**I WILL TRY TO FACE LIFE  
SQUARELY AND  
TO FIND AND GIVE THE BEST<sup>3</sup>**



(Top) The Business Girls council confers in one of the YWCA lounges in 1920.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for  
Pacific Northwest Studies.*

(Bottom) From the early days of the YWCA, boating trips to the islands and bays around Bellingham were popular excursions for young working women.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for  
Pacific Northwest Studies.*

Throughout the 1920s, the city of Bellingham held an annual Tulip Festival during the first week of May.<sup>4</sup> The festival's highlight was the lavish Tulip Parade, over two miles in length, comprised of over 100 tulip-adorned floats as well as marching bands and decorated cars. The YWCA participated in this popular community event, entering floats which emphasized the organization's values of healthy living as well as global unity and international peace, very much on members' minds after the carnage of World War I.

The Kumtux Business Girls Club, an indication of the growing numbers of women office workers, was another Bellingham YWCA program. (Kumtux means "knowledge" in the Chinook trading language.) Among the club's many projects was a Silver Tea to raise money for planting flowers and shrubs on the vacant lot to the south, since 1998 the home of Dorothy Place for families who have escaped domestic violence. Civic Club President James Malchett had suggested it would be "commendable" for the YWCA to beautify its adjoining grounds.

Programs and clubs continued to grow. There were "weight normalization" classes and a baby health clinic, indicating widening interest in family-oriented classes to expand upon the well-established focus on the needs of young single women. Among other classes were glee club, basketry, cookery, millinery, a literary study of modern fiction, and current events. One class was titled "Problems of the Modern Girl in the Home, in Marriage, Work, Education and Religion." Ever an advocate of self-improvement, the YWCA also sponsored "After High School What?" a vocational conference for high school girls, held in 1921.

Recreational, exercise and camping programs at the YWCA reflected people's great interest in the health and spiritual values of physical exercise and being outdoors "in nature." It was a national, even international, trend but the Pacific Northwest offered unusually rich opportunities for these activities that flourished as YWCA programs during the 1920s and even into the 1930s, despite severely reduced budgets during the Depression.

From its earliest days, the YWCA offered summer camps at Lake Whatcom, Lummi Island, and Orcas Island, as well as boating trips to the islands and bays around Bellingham. Camp Olga at Doe Bay on Orcas Island provided healthy camping experiences for young grade-school girls and Girl Reserves. The YWCA cabin on Lummi Island served "underprivileged" girls. Normal School women could attend summer conferences at Seabeck, a YMCA and YWCA Conference Center on the Hood Canal, where they could meet and become inspired by other college women and regional leaders from the Northwest area.

Various outings, picnics and boat day trips were arranged for residents, local business and working girls and young immigrant women. In a July 21, 1930 *Puget Soundings* column, journalist June Burns described her trip with the YWCA Business Girls Club on the sailing yacht, *Thetis*, owned by Dr. Carl Erb. The group sailed to Vendovi Island to picnic on the beach, followed by dinner on Dot Island in Chuckanut Bay. Burns enjoyed the "gay, carefree racket of girls forgetting their work for a day." And she enthused, "When before has the world been so free, so good and clean and tolerant and safe for play?"

Then came the Great Depression and World War II.



In this photo, taken October 29, 1931 in the YWCA ballroom, domestic aide students learn how to properly set a table and serve a meal.

*Emil Jacobson, YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*



## The Great Depression

The Great Depression period technically began with the Wall Street “Crash” on October 29, 1929 and ground to a close in 1939 as ominous events portending war were menacing Europe. It took a year for the full impact of the Depression to hit Seattle and King County. There, and presumably in the counties to the north, construction slowed dramatically, and the resource industries such as lumber, fishing and mining, began cutting production.

The economic situation was worsening, but it was not until June 1930 that massive reductions of workers at the Seattle lumber mills and in other industries took place. The Depression affected most people to a certain extent, but workers connected with the resource industries, construction workers and unskilled laborers were especially afflicted.

For women, the watchwords were “economy,” “thrift” and “frugality.” Middle- and working-class women sewed clothing and furnishings, re-tailored hand-me-downs, grew vegetables and canned produce. Newspapers and women’s magazines featured economical recipes such as “meatless meatballs,” made with rice, peanuts and cottage cheese; “poor man’s casserole,” utilizing cabbage, potatoes and ground beef; and “Depression” cake. One recipe suggested, “a crown roast of wieners is an ideal solution for guest problems when the budget is low.” It featured frankfurters tied in a circle like a crown roast of beef, filled with mashed potatoes and cabbage and baked. Since most middle-class married women did not work outside the home, their task was to stretch the household’s resources as much as possible.

As the period began, the YWCA board and members were engaged, as usual, in securing funds to continue the organization’s programs. In late July 1930, a fund-raising lawn party in honor of the YWCA was held at Secelechel, (now Lairmont Manor) the home of Frances Larrabee, on Fieldston Road in what is now Edgemoor.

The entire event had been planned under the leadership of Charlotte (Mrs. Pelagius) Williams. The guests were transported out to the estate by a motor car shuttle service which met the streetcars in Fairhaven and was

organized by Elizabeth (Mrs. Hugh) Diehl, wife of the local Ford dealer. Singles and doubles lawn tennis matches as well as volleyball games were organized by Jessie (Mrs. Sam E.) Carver. Local teachers arranged dance and music programs. Dressed as a “gypsy queen,” Mrs. Charles Burnett told fortunes. There were refreshments and an evening concert by the Elk Band.

Then a classic pageant, directed by Sue Boynton, wife of physician and surgeon Solon R. Boynton, portrayed the work and ideals of the YWCA, showing the “far-reaching influence of the association in the home, the school, industrial centers, business life and social services activities.” It was, concluded the *Bellingham Herald* on July 24, “one of the loveliest social events of the summer” and a “decided financial success.”

It was a bright spot in an otherwise gloomy time.

In 1930, journalist June Burns wrote a series of “Puget Soundings” columns for the *Herald* in support of Community Fund organizations, of which the YWCA was one. She noted that the financial downturn was hitting “common laborers” especially hard. Readers were encouraged to help “kick out Ol’ Man Depression” and find jobs, even small household odd jobs, to help those out of work. The YWCA’s employment office was finding an average of a job a day for young women.

By 1931, the Great Depression had settled in. During that year’s Community Fund campaign, the “character-building” organizations, which included the YWCA, the YMCA, Boy Scouts and Campfire Girls, were asked to forego their shares in the campaign’s funds that year in favor of relief groups, such as the Lighthouse Mission and Washington Children’s Home.

These organizations agreed to support the drive’s relief efforts by not taking funds that year and to unite for their own fund-raising drive, which did not meet its goal. In 1932, the Community Fund again was successful, but the “character-building” organizations were asked to reduce their budgets, although they still received 78 percent of the originally approved amount.

Operating with curtailed resources, YWCA staff and volunteers concentrated on helping needy women find what few jobs there were, including exchanging room and board for housework. In 1931, a course to train unemployed women for domestic work was undertaken, instructed by Miss Adele Jones and Miss Gertrude Langley.

By 1931, four to five million Americans were out of work, and by that year's end 2,293 banks had suspended operations – a figure that rose to 4,000 closed banks in the year 1935. In Seattle, massive reductions at the lumber mills began in 1930, followed by cutbacks in the fishing, coal mining, flour milling and ship building industries. According to estimates, 11 percent of Seattle's work force was unemployed in 1931, rising to 26.5 percent in 1935. Others who were lucky enough to have jobs experienced drastic reductions in wages and could not consume goods and services as they had before. Some politicians and citizens believed that relief was the responsibility of charities and local government, but these resources were quickly overwhelmed.

At a Washington Commission for the Humanities-sponsored symposium, "Folklore of the Northwest Corner," held at Western Washington University in 1979, Whatcom County shingle mill worker Elmer Smith recalled that the Depression began for him in 1929. "My brother and I leased a small mill at Acme . . . we were going pretty good, and the Depression hit . . . Wall Street had panicked . . . In a matter of three weeks, the price of our shingles went from \$3.15 for Number 1's down to \$2.60. We were manufacturing them at a loss, so we had to close down the mill." He told of being given a young heifer from a farmer in Lynden in exchange for a \$45 debt because he had five children to raise and "we were down pretty close to nothing."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the general economic difficulties, women faced unique problems during the Depression. At a 1981 Washington Commission for the Humanities-sponsored conference, "The Great Depression and Its Fifty-Year Shadow," held in Bellingham, Grace Heslin, a senior citizen, recalled her experiences with pregnancy and child delivery. "Many women who had children gave birth at home. If you went to the welfare offices, they

would tell you to have your baby at home. 'Well, what about the doctor bills?' 'Don't pay 'em. The doctors are not going to starve to death.' I had one of my children at St. Luke's hospital; my doctor bill was \$35, my hospital bill was \$35, and we stayed ten days . . .

"And there were many women who had abortions," Heslin added. "They just couldn't afford to have children, and this could be the worst tragedy of the times. There were a couple of doctors here in town who would perform these abortions illegally, and in those cases the women were safe. But there were literally hundreds of abortions performed by unqualified people, and there were deaths in this town of young mothers who had these abortions. But they had very little choice; these were the kinds of things that they had to face."<sup>2</sup> An unidentified woman at the conference corroborated this predicament, "If there was one tragedy that could befall a young married woman, it was to find yourself pregnant. Believe me, there was no help. I was in this position, and I went to the welfare. They told me to go select a doctor. I said, 'How will I pay?' 'Don't pay.' 'What about the hospital?' 'Have your baby at home.'"<sup>3</sup>

In Bellingham, service and relief agencies tried to staunch the hunger and need. Kiwanis, Rotary, Eagles and other service organizations formed a volunteer relief organization. The Red Cross furnished milk to children in the schools and later delivered to families with children who couldn't get milk. People donated clothing; farmers bartered food for services; and neighbors helped neighbors.

Local historian Gordon Tweit remembers that chickens and cows were still allowed within the city limits, people had vegetable gardens for their families, and fish and shellfish were available. He recalls that "cows were tethered in the grass along Wilson Avenue in Fairhaven." People shared what they could with relatives and neighbors.<sup>4</sup> The city and county tried to develop small public works projects to hire unemployed men, but as Steve Price, city planner, noted at the 1981 conference "the city government was small, there wasn't a whole lot that the city was doing; there wasn't a whole lot that the community wanted."<sup>5</sup>



The Kumtux Business Girls Club held a banquet in the YWCA ballroom in 1931.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

The national and local YWCA's first response to the need was to try to help women find what few jobs there were. In 1932, as the Depression worsened, the Bellingham YWCA offered 543 free nights and breakfasts to women in need, according to Dorothy Culjat, a later YWCA executive director who attended the 1979 conference.<sup>6</sup> They developed a clothing relief depot and had a cafeteria, which provided meals at very low cost. Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected U.S. president in 1932 and immediately set about creating various employment programs such as the Work Project Administration (WPA) and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

In Bellingham, the housing market evaporated as the Depression wore on, and almost no buildings seem to have been built until the later part of the decade. Then, however, with federal, state and bond assistance, Fairhaven Junior High (now Middle School) was rebuilt in 1937 after the Fairhaven School fire the night of December 31, 1935 and Bellingham High School was constructed and dedicated in 1938. City Hall was completed in late 1939 and parks, including the bridge at Whatcom Falls Park, were improved – all of which created jobs. At the Pacific American Fisheries, work continued but hours were spread around to help men with families. By the end of the decade, the area was slowly beginning to recover.

During this period, the Kumtux Club for young business women, Industrial Girls, Girl Reserves and other clubs continued at the YWCA. There were exercise programs for women, summer camping for Girl Reserves and swimming lessons for everyone, including boys and girls under nine and older girls. A camp for “underprivileged” girls operated from the Lummi Island cabin, and Jessie Carver, wife of the Normal School athletic director Sam Carver, held a “swim-for-safety” campaign. At the end of the decade, there were 28 different active classes or clubs.

By 1938, war clouds were on the horizon. Public affairs forums on “Munitions” and “The International Crisis and the American Peace Movement” focused attention on the “turmoil in the world today,” but generally the YWCA's energies were taken up with classes and recreational activities.

In 1939, the YWCA observed the Silver Anniversary of the building's donation. The celebration continued into 1940, with a reception held on April 12 at the YWCA to commemorate the building's opening. Invited guests had been asked to dress in period clothes from 1915. Accepting the invitation in a hand-written note, Frances Larrabee wrote that “the matter of dress will be easy; most of my clothes *are* about twenty-five years old, and all of them *look* twenty-five years old, so I shall have no trouble on that point.”

At the celebration, Alwina McCush, the first YWCA president, carried a cake with 25 lighted candles to Mrs. Larrabee's place at the speaker's table. Frances Larrabee commented that the cake reminded her of her 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. “One of the privileges of age is to indulge in memories,” she said. “On my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday I was in Germany. When I think now of those grand people, of all they gave to the world and could still give to the world, ruined now, perhaps forever, it makes me sad.” Frances Larrabee died a year later, in June 1941.

Hand-written letter from Frances Larrabee accepting the YWCA's invitation to be the guest of honor at the 25th anniversary celebration of the YWCA building's dedication.

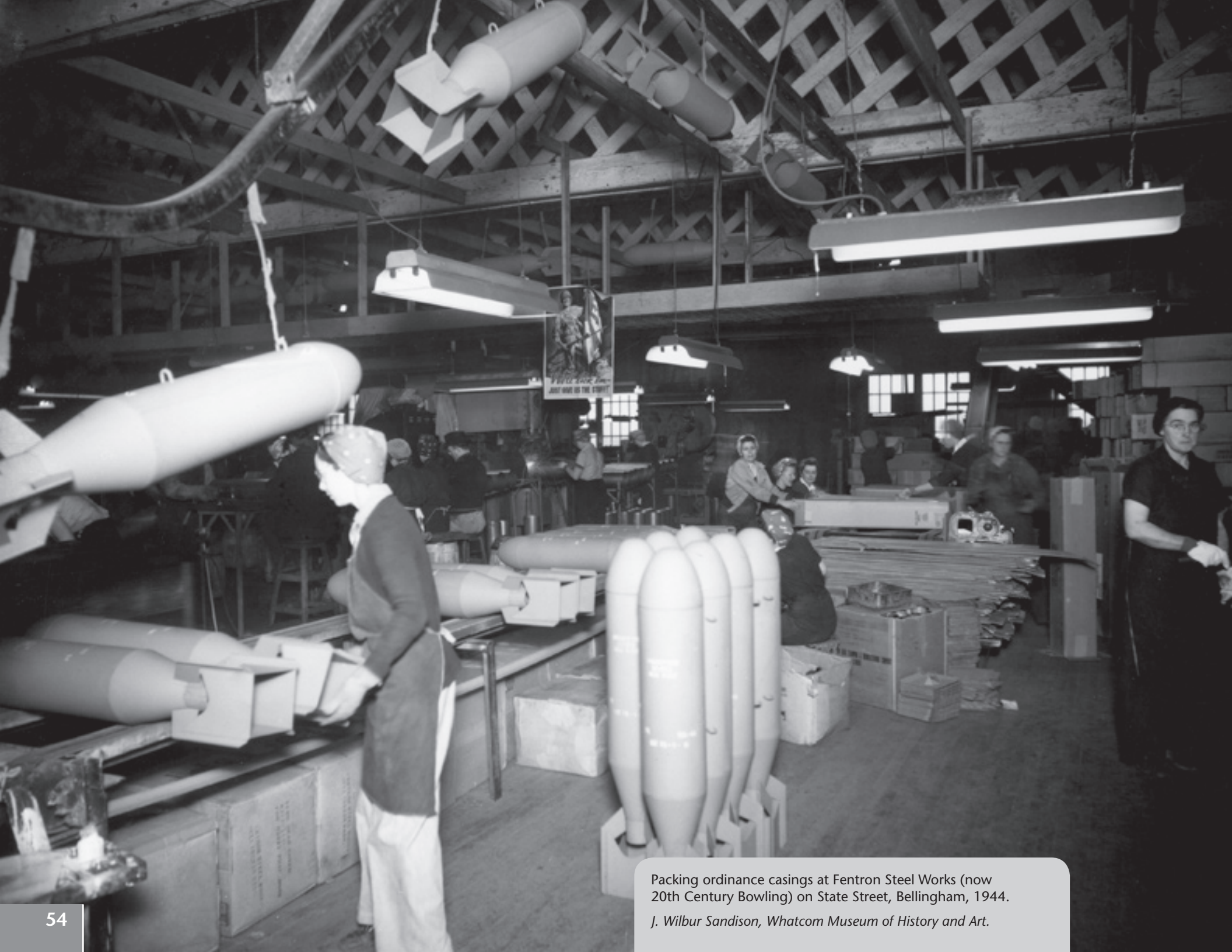
YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.

NUMBER ONE HARTMAN ROAD  
BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON

My dear Miss Mano - I accept with pleasure the very kind invitation for the anniversary dinner on Friday, the 12<sup>th</sup> at 6.30. It will be a pleasure to meet old and new friends. The matter of dress will be easy; ~~most~~ of my clothes are about twenty-five years old, all and all of them look twenty-five years old, so I shall have no trouble on that point. I look forward to meeting you very much,

Cordially,  
Frances Larrabee.

(Ms. A. 1. 2)  
April 9.



Packing ordinance casings at Fentron Steel Works (now 20th Century Bowling) on State Street, Bellingham, 1944.  
*J. Wilbur Sandison, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

## World War II: The Homefront

In early 1941, the Bellingham YWCA sent contributions to Clementine Churchill, head of worldwide YWCA war emergency work and the wife of Winston Churchill, prime minister of Great Britain. It was a gesture of support and acknowledgement of the war that had been declared in Europe in 1939 with the German invasion of Poland.

After the United States entered World War II in December 1941, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, YWCA women participated in support activities for troops and their families, including organizing USO entertainment for servicemen and a club to provide a social outlet for women high school graduates who went directly into the work force, replacing absent men. “Rosie the Riveter” became a national symbol of those women who built planes, ships and trucks, worked in factories and otherwise left traditional women’s jobs to keep the country – and the war effort – going. From ferrying aircraft to outfitting warships in shipyards, from testing ammunition to driving taxis, women were working to support the country’s war efforts, to secure more monetary independence or to help support their families.

Partly as a result of posters and print media campaigns, American women, whether they were motivated by patriotism, economic benefits, independence, social interaction, or necessity, joined the workforce in unprecedented numbers. In July 1944, when the war was at its peak, over 19 million women were employed in the United States, more than ever before.<sup>1</sup> After the scarcity of jobs and money during the Depression, the war effort presented an unparalleled opportunity for women to earn better wages and acquire new skills.

Many women joined the military, including an estimated 140,000 in the Army Nurse Corps and 100,000 in the Navy Nurse Corps. Oveta Culp Hobby was commanding officer of the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). Woman pilot Jacqueline Cochran lobbied Eleanor Roosevelt in the early 1940s to establish a women’s air force division to ferry planes from manufacturing plants to military bases, freeing up men for combat missions. The Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) was established in 1943 and deactivated in December 1944. Around 25,000 applied for training with

ultimately 1,074 graduates of the training program at Avenger Field in Texas serving in the WASP; women received the same training as men.<sup>2</sup>

The posters and advertisements used to mobilize women into the workforce stressed the temporary and vital nature of the situation. By suggesting that the current situation was only temporary and necessary for the common good of the country, the public accepted women’s participation in non-traditional jobs without challenging the basic belief about women’s roles.

Not all women, of course, were working. Although the majority of married women remained homemakers, everyone was urged through an intensive government media campaign in newspapers, magazines, on radio shows, posters and pamphlets to “Make Yours a Victory Home,” “Plant a Victory Garden” and “Use It Up – Wear It Out – Make It Do.” Countless numbers volunteered to help in organizations such as the Red Cross that were connected with the war effort.

A number of food and household items, such as sugar, butter, meat, clothing, shoes, gasoline, and tires were rationed using a system of stamps that controlled how much could be purchased. The 1943 *Good Housekeeping Cookbook* had a special section for recipes and daily menus to use for rationing. Women were advised to be frugal, to carry groceries instead of using the car to preserve tire rubber for the war effort, to sew and repair clothing rather than buy new clothes, to recycle scrap metal, to raise money for and contribute to war bonds, and in general to support the war effort through sacrifice on the Home Front.<sup>3</sup>

By August 1944, Eleanor Roosevelt addressed the question of whether women would want to keep their jobs after the war. She wrote, “when I asked Miss Mary Anderson of the Bureau of Women in Industry, she told me it all boils down to economic necessity. Married women usually keep their jobs only when they have real need for money at home. This, of course, does not mean that women who take up some kind of work as a career will not stay in that work if they like it, whether they are married or single.”<sup>4</sup>



Mrs. Roosevelt continued that “the main job of the average woman in our country still is to marry and have a home and children,” adding that there must be family-supporting jobs for men returning to civilian life. She noted that, “the first obligation of government and business is to see that every man who is employable has a job, and that every woman who needs work has it. A woman does not need a job if she has a home and a family requiring her care and a member of the household is earning an adequate amount of money to maintain a decent standard of living. If, however, there is a margin of energy left in men or women and they want to put it into bettering their standard of living, it seems to me that they should have the opportunity” for creative work and jobs.

In addition, she stressed that women should not allow themselves to be used by employers to keep down wages for men. And, she concluded, there must be adequate childcare available for the children of working mothers, a mission which the Bellingham YWCA soon began to tackle.

The Second World War ended in 1945, with Germany surrendering to the Allies on May 5 and Japan on August 15. To help secure international peace, the United Nations was immediately formed, holding its first meeting on October 24, 1945. The causes of international peace and world fellowship had been important to the YWCA organization since its beginnings in England in 1855 and to the local YWCA since the Normal School members of the YWCA Club “adopted” a child in India in 1900. These two themes continued to be prominently addressed through Bellingham YWCA activities during the post-War period and beyond.

During World War II, there were War Stamp and Bond drives and collections for the USO and Red Cross in schools, factories and anywhere people gathered. This photo, taken in front of the American Theatre on Cornwall, circa 1944, was part of that Homefront effort. The marquee film, “The Fleet Is In,” starred Dorothy Lamour, a popular entertainer with Bob Hope’s USO troupe.

*J.W. Sandison, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



## Catherine Oreiro Tally

*A Builder in War and Peace*

The late Catherine Tally was a builder – of ships of war, of a family, of a community. As a very young woman, during the 1940s, she was a welder in the shipyards at Bremerton. There, she helped launch vessels that brought an end to World War II. She was, as her family so well knows, “a liberated woman long before there was such a thing as liberated women.”

She also built a family: four children by her first marriage, at 16, to Marcario Oreiro, and two from her second to Robert Tally Sr., a career member of the U.S. Navy whose assignments took them across the United States.

It was in South Carolina, after women had retreated from their wartime jobs when men returned to civilian life, that she drew media attention for being a woman welder who taught men that skill. And she was a Native American woman welder whose shop foreman was the Grand Wizard of the local Klu Klux Klan. She loved to tell how they got along famously, typical of how she always made the most out of any situation that others might find difficult.

When she returned to the place of her birth, the Lummi Nation, she used her skill for the benefit of her community, welding the floodgates for the Lummi Aquaculture project and backstops for baseball fields.

Catherine Oreiro Tally had little in material resources. But she had untold riches of spirit. She was in poverty herself, but she became an advocate for others; for the voiceless of the community.

She was passionate about education, for herself and for the people she loved. She earned a college degree. She was Lummi Education Coordinator and, later, a member of the Elder’s Advisory Committee for the Lummi Tribal School. She was also a Community Health supervisor. She campaigned for senior citizens programs, tirelessly pressing Lummi Nation leadership, state and federal agencies for what now is the Little Bear Creek Elder Apartments. She fought for Native rights at the highest levels of government.

She drew local and national recognition for her work. In 1992, AARP designated her as the association of retired persons’ national minority affairs spokesperson. In 1999, the Whatcom Volunteer Center celebrated her efforts to promote literacy through the Grandparents Brigade at Lummi Tribal School.

The word “fear” was, as those who knew her best say, not in her vocabulary. She would take on any challenge, including her life-long struggle against diabetes which, finally, took her life in 2003 at age 77.

For all of her strength, she was also gifted in gentler arts. She took great pride in baking beautiful cakes, in cooking wonderful food for her family and for community gatherings, in sewing dresses for her only daughter and a memorable Superman costume for her grandson.

We salute the late Catherine Oreiro Tally who was a builder all her life – with her hands and, most of all, her heart.

From the Northwest Women’s Hall of Fame citation, 2006.

*Photo courtesy of Oreiro and Tally families.*



## After Depression and War, a New Era

After a decade and a half of turmoil and anxiety, America emerged in 1945 into a period of relative peace and prosperity. As it had done in the past, the YWCA adapted its programs to the times while maintaining its mission of serving the needs of women and girls and, through them, their families and community.

After World War II ended, Americans were eager to be optimistic and to “lead the good life.” There was a national call to return to an idealized “suburban pastoral,” the vision of a life that perhaps never existed but encouraged women to return from war mobilization to their roles as homemakers, mothers and wives. The YWCA responded with a wide spectrum of programs centered around mothers, children, teens and family-oriented social events.

Often credited as one of the most significant pieces of 20th century legislation, the GI Bill offered to throngs of returning veterans changed American education, the economy and the nation. The measure paid for veterans to go back to school and earn college degrees or obtain vocational training that had previously been unaffordable for many. It released tens of thousands of men from farm work, unskilled labor or low-paying jobs and provided their families entry into middle-class America.

In Bellingham, enrollment at Western Washington College of Education had dropped to a low of 254 students in 1943 as young men went off to war and women supported the war effort in factories and offices. Western grew dramatically as returning veterans found an opportunity for a good education using the GI Bill. Students filled the halls to capacity and beyond, men outnumbered women students for the first time, and military barracks were moved onto campus to provide housing for students and their “Baby Boom” families.

The bill also provided loans to returning veterans to start businesses and buy houses that allowed families, even in small cities like Bellingham, to progress from rented apartments and houses to their own homes in the mushrooming affordable suburbs that sprang up to meet the post-war demand.

It was a time of general prosperity. With most of the world’s other industrialized nations’ infrastructure and economies crippled, the United States became the acknowledged international technological and industrial leader. Factories and manufacturing plants that had geared up for wartime production now switched to peace-time products: cars, various appliances to make housekeeping easier and television sets, which began to replace radio as a mass political and cultural force in the home.<sup>1</sup>

Returning veteran Jim Krause, attending Western Washington State College of Education on the GI Bill, studies with his young “Baby Boom” family, wife Janet and son Stephen.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



## World Fellowship

Even as the economy and families were booming, there were serious challenges. Immediately after World War II ended, came the onset of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, coupled with growing nuclear arsenals in both nations. The Korean War began in 1950 and lasted until 1953 with the loss of more than 54,000 American service members' lives. But formation of the United Nations in October 1945, had prompted hope for a more peaceful world and members, especially Y-Teens, supported UN activities such as World Peace Day.

YWCA members deepened their long-standing commitment to peace and international understanding. In November 1945, a World Fellowship series of teas highlighted the customs and foods from various countries represented in the Whatcom County population: Scandinavian, Central European and Icelandic. Proceeds from this and subsequent teas were sent to the YWCA World Fellowship organization.

Red Stocking Teas at Christmas raised funds for the World Fellowship, while annual International Night dinners in November highlighted various cultures with foods and national costumes. Lectures and talks kept YWCA women abreast of current events.

(Top) Y-Teens observe United Nation's Day, October 24, 1949. Rhoda Halverson (seated) signed up Bellingham High School Y-Teen girls for the "Crusade for Freedom" pledge, a UN project.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

(Bottom) Mrs. Hildur Helgasen (left) and Mrs. Nan Dybdahl Wilk (right) chat with Mrs. E. Landsley as they view an exhibit of choice old silver and wood objects from the Old World, at a World Fellowship tea honoring Scandinavian and Icelandic peoples. The little girl is Judith Hansen.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*





Y-Teens Margaret Lutz and Rhoda Halverson trim the fireplace at the YWCA for the 1949 Christmas season's Red Stocking tea with helpers Nils and Bergit Paulvsen, children of Mr. and Mrs. Viggo Paulvsen. Bergit holds a stocking for World Fellowship offering at the tea.  
*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

One of the busiest groups in the YWCA was the Bun Club for young adults out of high school. Formed during World War II for young women going to work directly after graduating from high school, the club continued to be active during the 1950s and into the '70s. Its name commemorated the buns, or rolls, that members brought to their monthly potluck dinners.

A fall 1953 article in the *Bellingham Herald* reported that the 20 to 30 young women in the club had a “constant program of activities that show a wide range of interest – some educational, some adventure-questing and some just for fun.” Picnics and camping parties were held at local parks and campgrounds, while dinners with international foods and evening entertainments were held at the YWCA or in members’ homes.



(Top) Underscoring the YW's interest in world fellowship, this December 1950 *Bellingham Herald* photo titled “Merry Christmas in Many Lands” shows Shirley McMicken, a Western Washington State College student from Port Angeles, peering through the YWCA's front doors, “smiling a Merry Christmas to all.”

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

(Bottom) The Christmas Red Stocking tea was a very popular annual event for many decades. In 1957, Mary Brown chairwomen of that year's event, explains the tea's fundraising purpose to Pamela Southas, 6, and WWSU student Hiroko Matsumoto, 22, from Kobe, Japan. Donations put in the red stocking helped provide graduate training in social work to young women in their native lands. Pamela is wearing an authentic costume from Greece, while Hiroko is dressed in a traditional Japanese kimono.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



A leadership project was the club's "Kits for Korea," collections of health, school, sewing and knitting materials that were mailed to YWCA-sponsored schools, hospitals and nursing homes in different parts of Korea for use by refugees and orphans from that war. The club also sponsored monthly dances for servicemen, held in the YWCA ballroom, and attended dances at the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station.

In November 1952, Miss Lim Bong Soo, a first grade teacher in Singapore, arrived at the YWCA for a three-month exchange visit to learn about the YWCA's activities. Funded by the Ford Foundation as part of its "Learning in Democracy" program, the 20 participants nationwide, all leaders from Asia, Africa and Europe, were invited to learn American methods of YWCA work. It was the beginning of a long friendship between the Bellingham YWCA and Miss Lim Bong Soo. When she returned for a visit in 1984, a reception was held in her honor in the ballroom.



At the 1984 reception for Lim Bong Soo, are (left to right) Dorothy Wachter, Lim Bong Soo, and Carol Batdorf.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

## A Focus on Growing Families

Activities for children and teens formed a major programmatic thrust during this time. Easter egg hunts, summer camping, Halloween decorations and Christmas visits from Santa Claus marked the passing of the seasons.

The Young Matrons (later Y-Wives) of the YWCA regularly sponsored free nursery care in the YW lounge, often in association with community events. Starting in 1947, the Young Matrons had a free supervised nursery two days a week in the YMCA building on State Street where mothers could leave their children for a few hours while they ran errands.

The national Girl Reserves program for middle-school girls and teens, begun during World War I, became the Y-Teens program. Sybil Tucker was program director for the YWCA during the great burst of activity following the war, followed by Catherine May who led the Y-Teens group throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. Dotty Dale writes that as chair of the board after the unexpected death in 1957 of long-time executive director Mildred Bartholomew, “We didn’t want to pull Sybil away from the big teen program she had going, so I became the interim executive director while we sought a new person for the job.” In the end, that was Sybil Tucker.<sup>1</sup>

(Top) Jeffrey Fox and Linda Duke, both two-year-olds, show their “finds” to Adeline Stenger at the April 1949 Easter egg hunt put on by the Young Matrons club. The event had about 70 youngsters in attendance for games, a short story hour and refreshments.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

(Bottom) Watching over the children in this October 1949 photo were Mary Fox (left) and Norma Thomas. Mimi Sue Thal is standing between them. In the foreground, reaching for blocks, is Milan Morston, while seated are Brian Hovander, Jeff Fox and Carolyn Frayseth.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*





Intently watching John Goodman and Clio Eldred as they demonstrate a life saving technique are a group of local teenagers taking the American Red Cross life saving course at the YWCA. Seated around the pool are (left to right) Carmen Lorenz, Joanne Bornstein, Jean Landahl and Fount Lorenz. Standing are Janice Bornstein, assistant instructor Marian Kuntz and instructor Jessie Carver in this 1947 publicity photo.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



During the time Catherine May was producing recreational programs for teens and pre-teens, Pat O'Brien, who arrived in Bellingham as a new teacher of health and physical education at Western Washington State College in 1951, remembers that "we developed Friday night sock hops on the YWCA ballroom floor, with record player and records." O'Brien also taught some ballroom classes for adults. She recalls that Mary Knibbs, who later became a Bellingham city councilwoman, was a "great teacher and caller of square dances with her Merry Nibs groups."<sup>2</sup>

Former YWCA board member and long-time avid volunteer, Pat O'Brien recalls that she "wanted to get acquainted with swimming opportunities in Bellingham" since she was teaching swimming classes at the college. "I volunteered on the Health Committee," she wrote, "which worked to improve the locker room and cleanliness of the facilities. For the sake of safety, we recommended removing the diving board in the too-shallow pool area, not a popular idea with some."<sup>4</sup>

Swimming remained one of the most popular programs offered by the YWCA as it had been since the pool opened in 1915. Frances Larrabee's grandson, Charles X. Larrabee 2<sup>nd</sup>, who now lives in North Carolina, recalled in 2005 his diving lessons with "Mrs. Jessie Carver, the best instructor ever" and "learning ballroom dancing at the YW but not in the pool."<sup>3</sup> Local business leader David Blair, whose mother was a YWCA board member, also remembers learning to swim at the Y and he and his friends mischievously exploring the upper residence hall floors, which were off-limits, when he was about 8. Both girls and boys took swimming classes until they were about 9, after which the boys went to the YMCA. Classes were taught by Jessie Carver, the wife of Sam Carver, chairman of the physical education department at Western Washington State College, by Carolyn Griffith and other part-time instructors.



A group of young girls in 1949 use the pool under the direction of instructor Carolyn Griffith (top row, far right).

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*



The May 1951 style show was a fundraiser for the YWCA building fund. Wendy Elick practices modeling while Marie (Mrs. Douglas) Blair (left), Irene (Mrs. Harold) Walton and Susan Rumery watch.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

## Fashion Fun

In 1947, Parisian designer Christian Dior introduced his “New Look,” feeding an interest in women’s fashions that had been repressed for nearly two decades of scarcity and clothing rationing. In the 1930s, the fashion theme was thrift. During the war, with clothing rationing and a lack of natural materials reserved for the war effort, the theme was long-lasting durability and economy of materials. The Dior look featured longer, fuller skirts and small waists, a soft, feminine fashion whose use of many yards of fabric was seen as luxurious.

Women’s organizations and clubs nationwide began putting on fund-raising fashion shows, which were fun-filled entertainment that was supported by local women’s dress shops and department stores as a marketing strategy, while raising much-needed money for the organization or cause. The local YWCA Young Matrons and Y-Teens groups plunged energetically into this popular social activity, putting on numerous shows throughout the decade and the next. It was part of the expanding middle class, optimistic spirit of the times.

(Top) The 1953 style show was presented by the YWCA Young Matrons with (from left) Esther (Mrs. Russ) Bliss, young Gail Lee Wallace, two-and-a-half years old, and Mrs. Ken Conner.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

(Bottom) The Y-Teens held a fashion show at Gage’s Store in 1954. These girls were modeling formal, sports and school or business attire.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*





## Growth and Celebration

Under the leadership of executive director Mildred Bartholomew, who arrived at the Bellingham YWCA in 1943 from the Portland, Oregon YWCA, the services of the local organization were expanded throughout the county in the areas of adult education, the Y-Wives program, the Sunset Club for the elderly, co-educational activities, nurture of private kindergartens, establishment of a nursery for exceptional children and neighborly relations with the women of the Lummi nation. Miss Bartholomew remained director until her sudden death in March 1957 and proved to be an energetic, popular community leader.

The YWCA continued to be a place where women could learn leadership skills through developing programs, chairing meetings, holding board offices and attending regional and national conferences. At these conferences, they met women with similar community interests who were eager to discuss various issues and projects. The YW women returned to Bellingham reinvigorated and full of new ideas.



(Top) On June 10, 1948, Violet ( Mrs. Archie) Gerry, Sybil Tucker, assistant director of the Bellingham YWCA, and Margaret (Mrs. Roy A.) Nelson were off to their first national conference.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

(Bottom) In 1961, YWCA board members prepared to attend the national YWCA convention at the YWCA's Asilomar Conference Center in California. Standing left to right are Amy (Mrs. Walter) Fegley and Dorothy (Mrs. J. Alan) Ross. Seated left to right are an unidentified person, Sybil Tucker, Lillian (Mrs. John) Dickerson and Catherine (Mrs. Edgar) May.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

A former board chair and interim executive director after the death of Bartholomew in 1957, Dotty Dale recalls attending the national YWCA conference in St. Louis in the spring of 1958 with Catherine May and Lillian Dickerson. "That was very special for me," she remembers. "I had attended the 1946 national conference in Atlantic City, [New Jersey] as a college student. It was at that meeting that we voted against segregated local YWCAs." Dale added, "The YWCA gave me so many models of strong independent women. When the new women's liberation movement came along, I didn't have the same cravings for freedom from gender bondage. I was well freed, largely because of the YWCA."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout this decade and the next, classes continued to expand. In 1951, among the classes offered were ones in ceramics, knitting, food budgeting, cooking, children's sewing and "How to Preside Without Quaking."

In March 1955, the YWCA celebrated the centennial of the international YWCA's founding in London in 1855. The occasion was recognized by the local organization at its 48<sup>th</sup> annual meeting, which was attended by Alwina McCush who had been elected in 1907 as the local YWCA's first president. McCush was accompanied by her daughter, Lillian Teel.

Throughout the period, lectures and forums on various issues continued to keep members informed and engaged. Programs for mothers and toddlers, forums on current events, the Red Stocking and Silver teas, fashion shows and various club activities all made the YWCA a community gathering place. This sense of community would expand during the 1960s and rapidly accelerate during the 1970s.

At a centennial celebration of the YWCA's 1855 founding in London, Lillian Teel points to a display card representing 1907, the year the YWCA was started in Bellingham and the year her mother, Alwina McCush, was elected as its first president. Others pictured are (left to right): Adele Jones, chair of the YW's centennial committee; Jean Smith, president of the YW board; Krista Nelson of San Francisco, member of the national staff and guest speaker; and Vivian Rasmussen, a YW member from Meridian High School. Nelson spoke to the meeting on the centennial's themes, "Fortify Freedom with Faith and Fellowship."

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



## Mildred Bartholomew

*“An outpouring of friendship and interest”*

While at the Portland YWCA, Mildred Bartholomew was one of three staff members to sign a letter, dated December 8, 1941, to then-Oregon Governor Charles A. Sprague commending him for his statement of support for second generation Japanese-Americans following the attack on Pearl Harbor and expressing concern for the young Japanese-American women whose parents were concerned about possible internment. These girls were frightened, the three women wrote, and the YWCA offered to extend whatever help possible to the Governor to improve this situation.<sup>2</sup> In 1942, the national YWCA extended its services to Japanese-American women and girls held in relocation centers.

In 1943, she joined the Bellingham YWCA staff as executive director, moving from the Portland YWCA where she was secretary of the department of religion and membership. Born in Belmond, Iowa in 1892, she was a graduate of Willamette University in Salem, Oregon and held

a master's degree in religious education from Columbia University. During her studies at Columbia, she worked actively in settlement houses in New York City.

“In her 14 years in Bellingham,” the *Bellingham Herald* reported upon her death in 1957, “she left a stamp on the community for her leadership in YWCA, church and welfare affairs. Few YWCA secretaries (*sic*) have taken such prominent part in local community affairs.”

An active member of St. James Presbyterian Church, “she took a special interest in newcomers to the city, displaced persons and refugees, helping them to become acquainted and find friends,” the *Herald* continued. She organized a World Friends group in the community that sponsored an annual International Dinner and was enthusiastic about the YWCA's World Fellowship movement and its local Arts and Crafts Hobby Fair.

She became a leader in the YWCA conferences at the state, regional and national levels. In Bellingham, she was an active member of the Council of Churches, Community Chest Council, United Good Neighbors and Agency Executives Council.

“Her outpouring of friendship and interest frequently was the subject of comment, the *Herald* concluded, as was her devout religious service.”<sup>3</sup>

Longtime YWCA executive director Mildred Bartholomew, far right, enjoys a china painting class, 1951.

*Photo by Jack Carver,  
Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



## Tumultuous Social Change: The 1960s

In contrast to the “normalcy” and conservatism of the previous decade, “the Sixties” nationally was a turbulent period of tremendous social change. The 70 million children from “Baby Boom” families who became teenagers and young adults constituted a “pig in the python,” a demographic bulge that has definitively influenced American society ever since.

Rejecting conformity, middle-class “boomers” wanted to find their own way, to explore the world and its ideas, to redress unacknowledged injustices at home and throughout the globe and to put an end to war, specifically the Vietnam War.

Because of the size of the post-war generation and the immediacy of media, especially television, the youth-oriented counterculture became a large movement, beginning in colleges and universities and spreading. These young people reacted against the frank materialism of the post-war period and were deeply involved in the Civil Rights movement, the Peace Corps and the War on Poverty. Civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was an organizer for the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. His iconic “I Have a Dream” speech, delivered on that occasion, raised public awareness of the civil rights struggle.

The assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in November 1963 in Dallas, King in April 1968 in Memphis, and presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy that June in Los Angeles shook the country. After King’s death, riots broke out in 60 cities throughout the country; these riots and extreme acts of militant protest added to a national sense of turmoil.

Still, a growing number of people nationwide began to participate in the movement toward racial and ethnic equality that produced the Civil Rights acts of 1964 and 1968. Organized efforts emerged in the late 60s and early 70s to secure equality for Hispanic farm workers led by Cesar Chavez and for Native Americans through the American Indian Movement.

In the late 60s after growing numbers of U.S. ground forces were deployed in Vietnam, widespread demonstrations vigorously protested the war and the draft. Across the country, protestors were occupying buildings, blocking freeways and organizing mass demonstrations.<sup>1</sup>

From ethnic clothing to Eastern religions, there was a growing interest in other cultures and perspectives. The dominance of Rock ‘n Roll, the revival of folk music in major cities’ coffee houses, and “protest songs” revolutionized popular music. Drugs such as marijuana and LSD became widely used by middle-class youth, an undreamt-of phenomenon in prior decades. In 1969, the Woodstock Festival, held on a 600-acre farm in Bethel, New York, epitomized all these aspects of the counterculture. Nearly a half-million people flocked to this bohemian event, which incorporated both the rebellion and the idealism of the times.



In 1969, students protested U.S. involvement in Vietnam by marching to the Federal Building in downtown Bellingham.

*Wilson Library Special Collections, Western Washington University.*



Three unidentified women picket a store in support of the United Farm Workers boycott of grapes picked without a union contract, one of the many protests during the 1960s.

*Wilson Library Special Collections, Western Washington University.*

While the nation was absorbing new trends and ideas, the counterculture “Hippie” movement burst upon Bellingham’s consciousness in 1968, when the music group Jefferson Airplane held a student-sponsored concert at Western Washington State College. Author Ken Kesey and his communal group, the “Merry Pranksters,” arrived in their psychedelic bus along with poets Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

“Lots of Bellingham people had only seen such dress and heard such ideas on television, not marching down their main street,” says Steve Mayo, Bellingham artist and a student at WWSC at that time. The times were both enlivening and deeply disturbing to the community, which, like the YWCA, struggled to retain its equilibrium while adapting to vast social changes.

For women, perhaps the most radical, far-reaching social change was the advent of “The Pill.” The convenient oral contraceptive gave women unprecedented control over their fertility. In the early 1960s, when the pill became available by prescription, its use was limited to married women. By the early 70s, when the age of majority changed from 21 to 18, its use became wide-spread, including by young, unmarried women. Marriage could be postponed in favor of an education and a career. Some credit – or blame – the pill’s availability with the major shift in women’s economic and social roles that evolved over the next decades and continue to have major implications for the lives of women and families nearly 50 years later.

It was a decade of challenge and change in almost every aspect of national life. Whether “pro” or “con,” few sectors of the society were unaffected.

If the underlying goal of YWCA activities remained faithful to the past, with an emphasis on “wholesome living,” the content was changing. In 1967, the Y-Teens heard a talk on the misuse of drugs and the “Hippie” movement, delivered by Rev. David Clarkson in an effort to inform young women of dangers that had previously been rare. A 1969 public affairs forum, “The Challenge and the Choices,” about pollution on Puget Sound, drew a large audience, a harbinger of the growing environmental movement. The first Earth Day blossomed in spring 1970.

Women of all ages were beginning to reexamine their own lives, a trend that would intensify in the 1970s and beyond.



## The YWCA Champions Social Justice

Terry (Teresa) Thompson Loe was president of the local Y-Teens in 1964-65. She recalls that “we were very much involved in Civil Rights issues, and I remember a leadership conference at Seabeck<sup>1</sup> that focused on this problem. Considering the cultural climate of the time in Bellingham, we were ahead of some of the other civic organizations on embracing change.”<sup>2</sup>

Nationally, the YWCA had long been a champion of civil rights, at least as far back as 1915 when its first interracial conference was held in Louisville, Kentucky. During World War II, the YWCA called for anti-discrimination in the military and defense industries, and, in 1946, adopted its Interracial Charter, moving to integrate its chapters eight years before the United States Supreme Court banned segregation in public schools. In 1960, the Atlanta, Georgia YWCA cafeteria was opened to African Americans, becoming the city’s first integrated public dining facility. The national YWCA board became a sponsoring agency for the 1963 March on Washington in support of civil rights and supported a Direct Action two-year project to complete desegregation of local community YWCAs.

In 1965, the board created the Office of Racial Justice, led by Dr. Dorothy Height, to carry out the YWCA’s civil rights program, and in 1966 the board voted to participate in Project Equality and reassess its business relations with companies that had discriminatory employment practices. Helen W. Claytor became the national YWCA’s first African-American president in 1967. Racial Justice Institutes were held in eight locations around the United States in 1969.

In 1964, the first Civil Rights act concerning equal rights in public accommodations and protecting minority voting rights, proposed a year earlier by the assassinated President Kennedy, became law. The second Civil Rights Act of 1968, often called the Fair Housing Law, extended equal treatment and was passed immediately after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The Bellingham YWCA called for its passage in a telegram to national government leaders in April of that year.

In 1970, two years after King’s assassination, the YWCA national convention, held in Houston, adopted the One Imperative: collective power exercised toward the elimination of racism, wherever it existed.

The national board’s Office of Racial Justice convened four conferences for women of color in 1970, seeking ideas for how best to put the program’s goals into action. Affirmative action workshops were held to teach YWCAs how to implement strategies, and a nationwide Web of Racism conference taught YWCA members how to recognize the layering of racism in jobs, housing, schools, institutions and daily life. The work on racial justice has continued throughout the last four decades, and “eliminating racism” is now one of the two major thrusts of the YWCA organization, along with “empowering women.”

At its 24<sup>th</sup> national convention, held in Boston in April 1967, the national board recommended an important change in the organization’s statement of purpose. Previously, the YWCA had been a Protestant-based organization in which members were devoted to “those ideals of personal and social living to which we are committed by our faith as Christians.” The adopted change reflected a growing sense of the need to be inclusive of other peoples’ faiths, as well as their cultures, as part of the organization’s commitment to social justice. The new statement of purpose read in part:

“The [Young Women’s Christian] Association draws together into responsible membership women and girls of diverse experiences and faiths, that their lives may be open to new understanding and deeper relationship and that together they may join in the struggle for peace and justice, freedom and dignity for all people.” The change was incorporated into the Bellingham YWCA’s constitution that year.



## “A Welcoming Place”

As a much-used community gathering space, the Bellingham YWCA was a “welcoming place,” according to member Linda Lambert,<sup>1</sup> both for long-time residents and for newcomers like her seeking friends and stimulating activities. Western Washington State College was growing rapidly during the ‘60s, and many wives and new faculty members became active in the YW.

During 1960, the YWCA was home for varying periods of time to 93 permanent residents and hosted 695 transient guests. The residents were high school, college, beauty school and business college students, office workers, clerks, waitresses, nurses and technical workers with an average age between 18 and 25.<sup>2</sup> With Catherine May as program director, the YWCA clubs met regularly: Y-Teens, Bun Club, Y-Wives and nursery, Residence Girls Council, a Singleton program of recreation and fellowship for single people, the Sunset Club for seniors, and forums and coffee hours with political affairs and travel programs.

In addition, many other community groups, ranging from the Washington Association for Retarded Children to the Mount Baker Hiking Club, League of Women Voters, Toastmistress Club and Daughters of the American Revolution, held their meetings there. Annual events included the International Dinner, Red Stocking Tea and an Interfaith Tea, begun in the 1950s and planned and hosted by women of Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish and Protestant faiths.

In 1962, the Y-Wives put on their annual Easter egg hunt, the yearly style show and the children’s Christmas Party. The Bun Club met twice a month with programs on travel, public affairs and crafts. By 1964, the Y-Belles

As shown in this promotional photo, in the fall of 1968 Nancy Garrett taught a beginner’s class in guitar for youngsters 8 to 12 years old. Reed Tumblin, 4, son of Jerry and Gay Tumblin, was in the Mothers and Tots swim class. Robert Adams was showing Y-Teen director, Mrs. Gail Miltimore, how he and his wife, Nancy, would teach a class in ballroom dancing. The Adams also taught a tap class at the YWCA.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

Club had been established for very young wives between 17 and 23; these women were informally “mentored” by the Y-Wives members with whom they co-sponsored several programs.

Locally, the YWCA’s long-standing commitment to world peace and international fellowship continued to be a major activity, with study groups, public affairs talks and international dinners. As African countries became independent throughout the 50s and 60s, the international YWCA sent mentors to villages to help indigenous leaders create YWCAs in Kenya, Uganda, Rhodesia, South Africa and elsewhere.

The events in Africa and other non-European countries were marked locally by an interest in these cultures and peoples. A “high point” of her YWCAs activities for board president Lillian Dickerson had come in 1959, she later wrote, meeting a team at a two-day World YWCA Council conference, including women from Nigeria, Philippines, Bolivia and Jordan, to exchange ideas, hopes and concerns.<sup>3</sup> In 1967, the annual International Dinner, held at Bellingham’s Twin Gables Restaurant, featured foods from the Far East, Armenia, Europe, French Canada and Israel.

In 1967, the local YWCA celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a dinner and dramatized review of the organization’s history, attended by more than 125 people.<sup>4</sup> Presenting portions of this story were Norma (Mrs. James .M.) Van Wickle, 1906-27; Dorothy Button, 1927-47; and Vivian (Mrs. Theo P.) Scholz, 1947-67; Madelyn Carlson was board president.

Under the leadership of executive director Sybil Tucker, the number of classes and programs proliferated and flourished. Swimming, health and fitness classes were popular, along with creative dance and ballet lessons, French and Spanish language classes, arts and crafts and choral groups.

Some members of the Bun Club enjoy an outdoor picnic at the Lake Samish summer home of member Doris White, 1953. The group was active into the 1970s.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

Former board member Elsie Heinrick remembers starting a “Moms and Tots” swim program with Pat O’Brien. O’Brien also recalls that at the same time she and Jim McKeller at the YMCA developed a joint “Moms and Tots” program at both pools – a cooperative venture of which they were both proud.<sup>5</sup> A harbinger of the times was a “Powder Puff Mechanics” class taught by service station operator Ralph Smith.

In 1969, it was estimated that over 10,888 people had participated in the various programs and classes. Membership dues were \$3.50 annually for adults, \$1 for junior and senior high school students.



By 1966, there were 24 volunteers heading up various committees ranging from personnel and finance to adult education, health, physical education and recreation, public affairs, religious resources, world fellowship and Y-Teens, in addition to the board of directors, trustees and professional staff.<sup>6</sup> The YWCA was bustling with members and activities. The web of YWCA influence in the community was extensive.

In his 1964 State of the Union speech following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson called for a “war against poverty.” At that time, the national poverty rate was around 19 percent.<sup>7</sup> Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act, creating programs such as Head Start, food stamps, work study, Medicare and Medicaid, and federal grants became available for various social services and training programs. In 1967 with the aid of federal grants, new areas of service were added at the YWCA,

reflecting the changing needs and social issues of the times: a Job Corps program, housing for Head Start trainees, Family Life education, a support program for at-risk teenage girls to remain in school, and programs for Spanish/American youth and Lummi teens.

A local support group for wives of Vietnam servicemen was established and YWCA members participated in a United Service Organization (USO) letter writing project for soldiers serving in Vietnam. In that year, the YWCA board of trustees voted to purchase the adjacent properties at 1000 and 1014 North Forest Street so that the organization owned the entire block from Laurel to E. Maple, bounded to the east by the alley behind the building. Head Start trainees – young women who would prepare pre-school children of low-income families to succeed in school through the federally funded program – were to be housed at 1000 North Forest.

In the 1970 *Annual Report*, board president Lillian Dickerson wrote that in 1969 “our dream of reaching better into the county is becoming a reality with board members and active programming. Our close ties with the [Western Washington State] College give resource leadership and residence girls to aid us in forward policy-making.” In addition, the focus on enjoyable recreational activities for teenagers and women, with splash parties, aerobics exercise and dances helped create a focal place for women and ideas to mingle.

A promotional photo for fall YWCA classes including “charm” classes and tennis lessons.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*



## Catherine May

*Bettering the lives of children and senior citizens*

Catherine May was in many ways a traditional woman of her times, raising a family of four children and caring for her grandfather, both of her parents and her husband's parents. Her daughter, Mary Pettus, recalls her as the "ultimate mother. She was always there for us, always there for lots of people."

But she went beyond the home, serving as president of the Aftermath Club, the American Association of University Women and the League of Women Voters. Elected a Bellingham School director from 1955 until 1970, she chaired the Washington State School Directors Association's services to handicapped children. As program director for the YWCA during the 1950s and 60s, she led the Y-teens group, organized a group for young married women with toddlers and provided various other programs that appealed to the community.

By the mid-1960s, she was achieving recognition for her leadership in the field of aging.

As director of Whatcom County Senior Services, she procured some of the first state and federal grants designated to help the elderly with nutrition, assistance and information, health care, housing and transportation. An early national advocate for senior centers, she oversaw construction of the first Whatcom

County senior centers in Bellingham, Blaine and Ferndale. She served as director when the program merged with the Whatcom County Park Department, and five new centers were added in Lynden, Everson, Sumas, Point Roberts and Welcome.

Recognizing the need to work for these programs at the national and state levels, she was a delegate to the national White Housing conference on aging in 1971 and again in 1981.

In 1986 she was appointed to the state Council on Aging, organizing and serving as president of the statewide Senior Services of Washington. She was named "Senior Citizen Professional of the Year" in 1994 by that group and was recognized as "one of the first national leaders around issues of older people long before there was general concern."

At her election to the YWCA Hall of Fame in 2008, her daughter said, "Catherine May had that rare gift of unconditional love and respect for those around her and the passion for bettering the lives of many." On a plaque dedicated to May at the Bellingham Senior Center is written: *Service, or time given with love, is at once the simplest yet greatest gift we can give and the one which brings the richest rewards.*

From the Northwest Women's Hall of Fame citation, 2008.

*Photo courtesy of Mary (May) Pettus.*





In 1974, these four students and YWCA residents, funded by the federal University Year for Action program, are (from left) Colleen Cossgriffe from Pullman, Valerie Varnuska from New York, Nancy Richter from Atlanta and Linda Taylor from Pasadena, Texas. At the November 18, 2008 Whatcom Museum presentation for the YWCA Centennial, Christine Kendall noted that this photo "features my long-time best friend, Nancy Richter." Nancy became a registered nurse and currently lives in North Carolina.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

## “To Be Themselves and For Others”

As a popular community gathering place known for its thoughtful programs on public issues and moderate, yet forward-looking attitudes, the YWCA was well positioned for the activism of the 1970s. That decade proved to be one of the most vigorous of the YWCA's entire history, with many new programs initiated, several with the financial aid of federal anti-poverty grants and other public funds. As board program chair Phyllis Jones recalls, “It was just like a beehive around here.”<sup>1</sup>

Executive director Sybil Tucker, board chair Lillian Dickerson and assistant director Alice Richards were local delegates to the April 1970 national YWCA triennial convention in Houston, Texas. There the national organization passed the One Imperative which called for the elimination of racism “wherever it exists and by any means necessary.” Reporting back to the local board, the delegates described the national Program of Action for 1970 to 1973, using the imperative as a focus to “eliminate poverty, end war and build peace, reshape the quality of the environment, revolutionize society’s expectations of women and their own self-perception and to involve youth in the Association’s decision-making process.”<sup>2</sup> This agenda served as the framework for a number of the programs begun at the local YWCA during the decade, aided by availability of federal “War on Poverty” grant funds.

Nationally, many middle-class women – some of whom had been involved in, or sympathetic with, both the civil rights and anti-war movements – had begun to read about and discuss gender injustices, to organize on behalf of women’s rights and interests. It was a time of “consciousness-raising,” a reevaluation of women’s social roles and personal lives. Betty Friedan’s book, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, questioned the middle-class mother-wife-homemaker model of women’s fulfillment and identity so pervasive throughout the post-war period. The book was much discussed and inspired a public reevaluation of women’s lives and goals, “permanently transforming the social fabric of the United States and countries around the world,” according to her *New York Times* obituary in 2006.<sup>3</sup>

Journalist Gloria Steinem and several other women founded a new popular magazine, *Ms.*, in 1971. The title reflected the search for an identity that was neither “married” nor “single,” but undefined by a woman’s relationship to male society. Middle-class women began to discuss empowerment: careers – rather than jobs – with equal salaries, personal relationships established on a basis of equality, and being effective policy-setters and influencers in the community. As an organization that had long fostered leadership development in its members, the YWCA offered opportunities to explore these ideas through tackling immediate unmet community needs.

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*In the 1972-73 annual report, board chair Mary Robinson wrote that “the Tuesday Forum sessions have spurred women of the YWCA to advocacy roles for minorities, problems of jails health, drugs, and sexism. Women of all ages are exploring their own identity, struggling to be themselves and for others.”*

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Mary Robinson became board president in 1972 with an agenda of “review, reform, renew.” An association review, periodically required by the national organization, provided an opportunity to scrutinize the YWCA’s community image, financial situation and the usefulness of its programs. The board reaffirmed its commitment to the national group’s Statement of Purpose to draw together women and girls of diverse experiences and faiths and to involve them in working on some of society’s pressing problems.

As the organization was again in a period of fiscal crisis, the property at 1000 North Forest St. was sold to Whatcom County, where it is presently the Courthouse Annex, housing the Washington State University County Extension program. After many years of service, Sybil Tucker retired as executive director in 1973, and Roseanna Stilwell (Page) assumed that position. She served for five years through the fervor of the time and the



financial stresses that accompanied it. She recalls, “When things were difficult, when I thought I might not make payroll, I could feel the prayers of the women who came before me giving me strength.”<sup>4</sup>

The YWCA opened a Women’s Rest Center at the corner of West Holly and Central Streets in 1970 and, in same year, Y’s Buys, a budget clothing shop, netted almost \$500 in its first five months of operation to help fund operations. Y’s Buys moved downtown to 314 Champion in 1974, where it was a familiar fixture until it moved to Holly Street in Old Town in 1988. Now known as Wise Buys, the shop is run by other volunteers to benefit Lydia Place, which provides transitional services to homeless women and children.

In the early 1970s, several active YWCA women, including Judy Bass, Margaret Aitken and Pat O’Brien, proposed a golf tournament to provide an outlet for women who enjoyed the sport but lacked a competitive event. The first tournament, organized by YWCA assistant director Alice Richards in 1973, was held at the Lake Padden Golf Course and netted a \$400 profit. The Twentieth Annual tournament, held in 1992 at the Bellingham Golf and Country Club, commanded a field of 144 women from Whatcom County, British Columbia, Bellevue and Spokane and raised \$10,500. The law firm of Chmelik, Sitkin & Davis devoted more than \$26,000 in proceeds from its charity golf tourneys in 2005 and 2006 to the YWCA. Frank Chmelik is a member of the YWCA’s advisory board of trustees.

Classes, meetings, physical fitness activities, swimming lessons and international nights with cooking demonstrations of ethnic foods continued. At that time, Pat O’Brien recalls, it was easier to find women to help out with these many programs and projects. “Women were willing to work on committees. If we needed helpers we’d just ask, and women would

Fran Johnson (left) and Pat O’Brien demonstrate their golfing technique to promote the second annual YWCA Golf Tournament in 1974. O’Brien was the first year’s event winner. The tournament was a popular fundraiser for decades.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*



volunteer to pick up prizes,” bring food, do what was needed. “We could take a piece of time and split up jobs to get things done. Volunteerism was more appropriate in those days.

“Most of us were raising kids, and we needed other activities so we could talk to someone more than three feet tall,” she smiled. “Women would get into groups with common interests.” O’Brien not only served on the YWCA board but also on the Whatcom County Park Board, to get swimming facilities and parks improved, and was active with Girl Scouts.

“We’re still doing these things now that we did 30 to 40 years ago”, she added, “but we’re now 30 to 40 years older. Our daughters don’t have the time. My daughter’s friends are running backwards. And volunteer activities take more time now, too. In sports, you have to specialize, you can’t just be a generalist. There aren’t that many ‘someone else’s’ these days.”<sup>5</sup>

As Stilwell Page says, “The 1970s was a different time for women. If women in their personal lives didn’t have a platform, a place to be themselves, the YWCA could provide that.” Thus there were “women doing extraordinary things as if they were ordinary.”<sup>6</sup>

Long-time YWCA supporters Lillian Dickerson (left) and Mary Robinson enjoy the Red Stocking Tea revival in December 2006. Dickerson has been active with the YWCA since the early 60s, serving as board president and board member several times. Robinson, whose mother was a YWCA president in Ashtabula, Ohio, was dean of women at American University in Beirut and board president of the YWCA there. She continued her interest when she came to Western Washington University and served as board president in the early 70s. She is currently a member of the YWCA advisory board of trustees.

*Photo courtesy of Alice Richards.*

In a letter to the YWCA board, Rosemary Torrence, who had been the first chair of the Eco-Action Group, wrote, “I couldn’t leave Bellingham without telling you what my membership in the YWCA has meant to me. Belonging to Eco-Action, gaining knowledge and confidence and growing with the group has been the most stimulating and rewarding experience of my life.”<sup>7</sup>

Stilwell Page’s initial impression of the YWCA and its energetic women was “there was such a breadth of interest and commitment, plus a strong board and general sense of humor.” She continued, “I allowed things to blossom,” and, as had been the case at other times, the national YWCA sent experienced women to help with advice.

And flower things did!





In this 1974 *Bellingham Herald* photo, Catherine Dolf (far left), YWCA nursery assistant, leads children in a circle game under the apple tree where years earlier youngsters played under the young tree on the YWCA lawn. In 1979, the YWCA building was placed on the state and national historic registers.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

## New Social Programs for the Community

During the 1970s, the YWCA nurtured an extraordinary number of forward-looking social programs. Focused on often-ignored problems, these programs were pioneered by YWCA women and later taken over by public agencies or other non-profits as the community came to realize their value. The availability of federal and state grant funds to address long-overlooked social issues plus the passion and energy of the YWCA board, members and staff contributed to the formation and success of these programs.

“More and more women needed to work, and getting women into employment was important,” says then-executive director Roseanna Stilwell Page. During the 70s, the Women’s Trade Center program at the YW helped women seeking job training and placement in higher-paying jobs in the skilled trades. At that time, women comprised 39 percent of the Washington labor force, with 2 percent in the trades. Skilled men in the trades earned on average \$9,862; full-time employed women, \$5,800.

Funded through the local employment office, the Women’s Trade Center offered speakers and programs to women and high school students to encourage them to enter the skilled trades as electricians, plumbers, mechanics or contractors. Since 1992, Bellingham Technical College has showcased the well-paying careers available to women in the trades and technology with its “Road Less Graveled” annual conference, continuing the support for women in the trades.

Stilwell Page credits Hadiyah (Joan) Carlyle, who lost her job as a welder when a Fairhaven ship yard had to reduce its workforce, with being the spark for its success during her four years as work center director. “Some women already had skills because they’d done projects with their fathers or brothers,” Carlyle recalls. “Bellingham Tech worked with us on aptitude tests, remedial math, training, placement and follow-up.

“Local industries, like Arco and Itarco, cooperated and unions signed on to the project. That was crucial at the beginning and it got easier after the first women showed they could do the work.” Carlyle subsequently received a master’s degree in social work from Rutgers University and had

a career in economic development for New York City before returning to the Northwest to live in Seattle.

Begun by the national YWCA in 1975, ENCORE was an exercise and support program for women who had had surgery for breast cancer. According to Stilwell Page, local YWCA member Joyce Busch read about the program in the national newsletter and asked if she could look into it further and present her ideas to the board. The board agreed, and Busch attended a national training program to begin a pool exercise, meal and conversation program at the YWCA.

At that time, Stilwell Page notes, cancer, especially breast cancer, was not discussed publicly, and there were no formal support programs. In fact, she recalls, there were objections to the YWCA’s ENCORE support program from people, including women, who felt “you should not pay attention to such things and live as if they didn’t happen.” After Busch started the program, Diana Ward, a passionate swimming instructor

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### Programs Started at the YWCA during the 1970s

- **Women’s Trade Center** – *Job training and placement in skilled trades*
- **ECO-ACTION** – *Banning oil tankers in Puget Sound and sparking creation of Boulevard Park*
- **ENCORE** – *Breast cancer awareness and support*
- **OPTION** – *GED program for young women and mothers*
- **Rape Relief and Battered Women** – *violence awareness and Crisis-Line assistance*
- **Y’s-Buys** – *Thrift Store*
- **Murphy House** – *Local jail alternative for women offenders*

who says her “drug of choice was chlorine,” took it over for several years. Today, cancer awareness and support programs are commonly accepted as a routine, but important, part of health care.

The YWCA also took in women mental patients when Northwest State Hospital in Sedro-Woolley closed in 1973, for what Stilwell Page has called the “community care fantasy.” Women who had been released from the hospital would show up for lodging, which could be provided with grant funding. Says Stilwell Page, “it was a ‘day and night’ difference” from the regular residence program. “We asked for funds from the local mental health board,” which the state had been setting up, and Dr. Don Berg made two professionals available every two weeks to train staff members about how to give support. Later the mental health board provided a half-time psychiatric worker for the program.

For a while, there was also a housing program for teens who were not doing well in foster care. “It was really hard,” concluded Stilwell Page, having an integrated facility with troubled girls and mentally ill women mixed in with traditional residents who, for decades, had been students, short-term visitors or new arrivals in town who needed affordable housing while they got settled. Still, “thoughtful people could see what we were trying to do.”<sup>1</sup>

Attending the November 18, 2007 talk on the YWCA at the Whatcom Museum, Amanda Fleming, an occasional guest, recalls, “While visiting Bellingham in the 1970s, I stayed at the ‘Y’ two or three times in one of the alcoves on the top floor. I really enjoyed the alcove rooms and the wonderful view they offered. I remember one summer night in 1974 when I opened the window and enjoyed the evening breeze while I listened to the radio. The last time I stayed there, however, there was a woman sleeping off a drinking binge in the alcove next to me, and she snored loudly all night. I think this was around the end of the time when the ‘Y’ was renting rooms or alcoves by the night.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1973, Anne Brown, a public health nurse with the Whatcom County Health Department who had already established programs for handicapped

children and their families, wrote to board president Mary Robinson about another problem she was seeing. “I have become concerned about two groups of young women in our community, young unmarried pregnant girls who drop out of school and these same young women after they have had their babies. Many of them seem to have similar backgrounds, problems and needs, but at present our community has no coordinated help available for them.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the OPTION program was born. The OPTION committee established a mother-toddler class to help young mothers (and fathers) cope with their children and other problems. The OPTION program offered general equivalency diploma (GED) classes weekly, taught by a teacher from Bellingham Technical School (now College), and childcare for the children. “Many of the young women had never finished high school,” Brown wrote. “(They) were interested in obtaining a GED but could not afford childcare for their young children; also some had no transportation.”

In addition, the program offered counseling, information on nutrition, cooking on a low income and sex education, and modeled good childcare practices and toys through the nursery program. OPTION committee members served as volunteer drivers and advocates for the participants and raised money through bake and rummage sales, until Bellingham Technical College offered childcare with its GED program, thereby serving both needs of the young mothers.

Two other very critical, but hidden, issues emerged: rape and domestic abuse. Throughout history, rape was a shameful experience, marked by silence, suffering, blame and little to no support of the victim. Local resident Geneil Chevalier, 84, whose mother-in-law, Hulda, had been an assistant cook at the early YWCA, belonged to Girl Reserves in high school, took part in an expectant mothers’ class in 1953, and frequently attended the Red Stocking teas. In 1971, she went to work at the Police Department where, as administrative secretary to Chief Terry Managan, she “was very aware of rape . . . and other things that were becoming a reality that had never even been heard of before . . . because our world had changed.

“Many things that are on the police blotter now just were never there. It was so different. Things happened but they were treated differently. They always say that more children are molested at home by relatives than what we read in the paper. I am convinced as I look back that I probably knew of some. I’m quite sure than the mothers probably knew about it, but we just didn’t talk about it because the world was different. You just did not talk about it.”<sup>4</sup>

State Senator Harriet Spanel remembers serving on the jury of the first rape case tried in Whatcom County in 1973. She was president of the League of Women Voters at the time, and “the lawyer asked if I was involved in the Seattle Rape Relief program. I wasn’t so I was not disqualified.” The youngest woman on the panel, Spanel, then 34, was the mother of three; two sons and a daughter. The women on the jury all had sons, and the men were older, she notes.

She clearly remembers the discussion, which revolved around “she deserved it.” The vote was 11-1, with Spanel the lone holdout, and the defendant was acquitted. “The dynamic – that if she was in a bar, she deserved it – showed she was clearly judged by who she was and what she did.” She adds, “It was an experience that made an imprint.”<sup>5</sup>

With the feminist movement building into a giant wave of nationwide social and political action not seen since the suffrage movement, rape and the related issue of battered women and domestic violence began to be talked about in women’s groups and organizations like the YWCA.

In the 1970s, members of the community discuss a long-hidden issue at “Speak Out Girl!,” a YWCA forum on rape relief.

*Photo by Jack Carver,  
Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*

As Stilwell Page says, “Sometimes you do what’s in front of you. . . All you can do is follow the next step.” Using available grant money, the YWCA began to hold forums on rape and battering. Stilwell Page recalls that “as soon as the topic was mentioned, guests often revealed they had been victims of violence.”<sup>6</sup>

With endorsement from the Bellingham Police Department and YWCA board support, volunteers established a crisis phone line, attended trials and hired, first, Judy Simmer to train Rape Relief volunteers and, then, Pat Cowen as director of the YWCA’s Rape Relief program, which also included a program for battered and abused women. In 1979, the YWCA Rape Relief and Battered Women program became Whatcom County Crisis Services, now Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services of Whatcom County.





Stretching along the eastern shore of Bellingham Bay, Boulevard Park is one of the most popular parks in Bellingham.

*Photo by Kelly Heese.*

## An Enduring Environmental Legacy

One of the YWCA's most enduring legacies is the work of its Eco-Action group. In the early 1970s, the group initiated the waterfront view protection project which, with the formidable clout of the Rotary Club of Bellingham, became Boulevard Park. The site was a blackberry-tangled waterfront strip where the ruins of Bellingham's water-based industries moldered. Where developers saw condominiums, YWCA Eco-Action women saw the potential for public waterfront access. The group went on to establish Protect Our Waters and lobbied U.S. Representative Lloyd Meeds and U.S. Senators Warren Magnuson and Henry "Scoop" Jackson to ban supertankers from upper Puget Sound waters.

In a recent group oral history interview,<sup>1</sup> Penny Berg, Sharon Schayes, Delight Green, Anne Rose, Phyllis Jones and Elsie Heinrick, all Eco-Action activists, talked about the group's accomplishments. Penny Berg had succeeded group founder Rosemary Torrence as chair.

Anne Rose, who subsequently became a Bellingham Planning Commissioner and City Councilwoman, describes her involvement: "When we moved from Portland, Oregon to Bellingham, I was concerned about the lack of public access to the waterfront here and the lack of any environmental movement. Someone told me there was a very good group that did a lot of study at the YWCA. "I remember Phyllis Graham was . . . one of our main researchers, and we really did a lot."

Penny Berg describes "this beautiful little community, sitting on this gorgeous piece of water, and there was not public access. . . That was the very beginning." We asked ourselves "why isn't there room somewhere for public access . . . for our children, for our children's children, for something for the future?" The group learned that plans were being made for a high-rise development along the waterfront north of the old Gas Works that would block the "Boulevard views" of the bay; the recent construction of Spinnaker Reach and the Riptide condos had already alerted concerned citizens to what could happen to public views.

On January 25, 2008, six members of the Eco-Action group gathered at the YWCA to reminisce about the group's activities in the 1970s. Seated left to right: Delight Green, Penny Berg, Anne Rose, Phyllis Jones. Standing: Sharon Schayes, Elsie Heinrick.

*Photo by Janet Marino, YWCA.*



The group developed a petition to stop the condominium building by downzoning the property to “residential low density one,” to “make people aware that we need to stop and take a look at what we have before any more development happens.” The petition was signed by 738 citizens. In the process, the group researched “who was who in Bellingham, who owned this property.” They also testified before the Planning Commission. Although the Land Use Commission turned down the zoning request in 1973, the group’s “impassioned campaign to protect the community’s views had called attention to the issue. Other organizations were taking an interest.”<sup>2</sup>

At a certain point, having had little success in persuading Mayor Reg Williams and the City Council to back the Boulevard view protection project, the group decided to enlist help: first from Brian Griffin, a

Bellingham Rotarian known for supporting civic improvements. About the Eco-Action group, Griffin writes in his book, *Boulevard Park and Taylor Avenue Dock on the Old Bellingham Waterfront*, “The women of Eco-Action hoped that I could advise them on lobbying the city, raising money, condemning property, and all the other actions that might have to be taken to preserve those Boulevard views. My meeting with Eco-Action convinced me of the urgency of the threats to the views along the waterfront.”<sup>3</sup>

“We knew we needed power and money,” says Delight Green. They turned to the Rotary Club of Bellingham, taking several members to lunch at the Bellingham Yacht Club, “and we essentially gave the project to them.” The club committed to the project in 1973. In his book, Griffin describes this meeting and the subsequent prodigious efforts of Rotary, led by the late Bob Moles, Sr., with support from the Bellingham Parks Department director, later mayor, Ken Hertz, that resulted in Bellingham’s treasured waterfront park. Rotarian Donald “Jim” Fickel, a local dentist, shepherded the project for seven long years.

Both the Rotary Club of Bellingham and YWCA’s Eco-Action Group were honored at park’s dedication in the summer of 1980.

Sparked by a public forum on pollution in Puget Sound, the group’s other goal was to ban supertankers on the upper Puget Sound. Green recalls that at that time “there was a kind of hysteria. People were afraid of what it would mean to protect the environment.” In the mid-70s, after the Boulevard view project, the group turned its attention to the possible impact of supertankers navigating Puget Sound waters to carry oil to refineries at Cherry Point and in Anacortes.

Ken Hertz, at that time Whatcom County Parks director, surveys the old railroad right-of-way, trestle and abandoned industrial sites, acquired for part of Boulevard Park.

*Photo by Jack Carver, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.*





Oil companies proposed to build new ports on Puget Sound where supertankers could unload oil from Alaska into a planned pipeline to the Midwest. While some Washington politicians, notably the state's first woman governor, Dixy Lee Ray, enthusiastically backed the oil port plan, U.S. Senator Warren Magnuson warned of the environmental catastrophe that would result if a supertanker lost its cargo in Puget Sound.<sup>4</sup>

"The plan was to dump the oil at a refinery and send it on the pipeline to somewhere in the Midwest, so we were going to get all of the risks and none of the benefits," says Sharon Schayes.

The Eco-Action group formed Protect Our Waters (POW), invited U.S. Representative Lloyd Meeds to lunch at the YWCA, lobbied in Olympia and with U.S. Senators Magnuson and Jackson. Again the group researched the issue thoroughly and kept officials informed. A concern was that the Port of Bellingham commissioners, at that time Pete Zuanich, Tut Amundson and Ken McAuley, would not support the ban.

The group invited the commissioners to lunch at Delight Green's home on Chuckanut Bay to see the "gorgeous view, which could be covered in oil." After lunch and Ramos Fizzes, she recounts, "We took them downstairs and showed them slides" of beautiful Puget Sound. Needless to say they had a great time. So it made us all friends . . . I think we convinced them that we had studied and were helpful. They did not take a stand for the supertankers . . . and that's one reason, I think, we don't have [them]."

On October 4, 1977, the same day that the first public hearing about the controversial project was being held in Bellingham, Magnuson attached a "little amendment" that prohibited construction of new oil ports in state waters east of Port Angeles – effectively banning supertankers from those waters – to a routine funding reauthorization of his Marine Mammal

Protection Act. The measure passed. Governor Ray denounced the senator as a "dictator," but the press and many citizens credited him with saving the Sound.<sup>5</sup>

With the passage of the state's Shoreline Management Act by public referendum in 1972, Rose chaired Bellingham's Shoreline Management Advisory Committee, which wrote the master shoreline management plan. Graham was appointed Whatcom County's Shoreline Management chair, Elisie Heinrick chaired Blaine's committee, and Green was also a County Shoreline Management committee member.

Heinrick notes that the Eco-Action group did a lot to write local plans for the management act "because we had done so much research on the waterfront. We ended up having a great deal of input." The Act contained three broad policies: encourage water-dependent uses; protect shoreline natural resources; and promote public access – principles that continue to guide planning, including developing the former Georgia Pacific mill site along the waterfront today.

Perhaps Anne Rose sums up many women's experience at the YWCA during the decade. "The YWCA was a great place . . . we learned skills, Eco-Action gave us a lot of skills. You can do things you didn't know you could."

"It was a real time for women," says Phyllis Jones. "I look back at Roseanna Stilwell and her fearlessness. We had five government grants going." Adds Penny Berg, "Yes, yes! This was one place in the community that social issues were recognized, not only recognized but they were spoken to, they were dealt with. This is where women could be active and do something."

## “We Empowered Ourselves”

After a decade of excitement, activism and expansion, the YWCA found itself facing fiscal crisis and searching for direction during much of the 80s. Many of the middle-class women who had traditionally provided the core of volunteer leadership and support of the YWCA's programs embarked upon careers or returned to school for advanced degrees or professional training. Women's lives and aspirations were changing rapidly.

“I guess we empowered ourselves,” members of the Eco-Action Group concluded during an oral history interview in January 2008. “Most women didn't work when we started,” acknowledged Anne Rose, who through her experience with Eco-Action went on to serve two terms as Bellingham Planning Commissioner and twice be elected to the Bellingham City Council. Executive Director Dorothy Culjat was elected to the Council in 1982 and Betty Kiner, a major figure in Eco-Action and many other YWCA programs, served on the Council in 1988.

Delight Green became a stock broker. Phyllis Jones renewed her nursing credentials and became director of the Lummi Clinic; Penny Berg also refreshed her nursing skills, and Elsie



Harriet Spanel  
Courtesy Photo

Heinrick went back to school and then worked as director of finance and administration at SPIE, a Bellingham-based international scientific society.

They were part of a national trend. In 1950, about 12 percent of women were in the workforce; by 1980, 45 percent of women were working, by 1987, that number had risen to 57 percent, more than half the female population of working age. That trend was paralleled by women returning to college. In 1985, about 53 percent of all college students were women, more than a quarter of whom were age 29 or older. In 1984, women received 49 percent of master's degrees awarded and about 33 percent of doctoral degrees.<sup>1</sup>

Women's presence in elective office also increased. In 1950, there were seven women in the 145-member Washington Legislature, a number that rose fairly steadily afterward, reaching a high of 60 in 2000. By 2008, their numbers declined slightly to 52 out of 147, still, more than a third.

Among YWCA members elected to the state legislature was Mary Kay Becker, whose co-authored 1973 fictional account of a Puget Sound ecological disaster, *Superspill*, was helpful in rousing public concern about potential oil tanker mishaps. She served in the state legislature from 1975 to 83, completed her law degree in 1982, and has been a judge on the state Court of Appeals since 1994.

Another longtime member, Harriet Spanel, who announced her retirement from the state Senate in 2008, was elected a representative to the state legislature in 1987 and has been for many years a leader in that body. A committed activist in state and local issues, she was involved with the League of Women Voters, which met at the YWCA. “There was a cross-connection with women from different groups; we all knew who was doing what,” she remembers.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the decade traditionally male service organizations such as Rotary and Kiwanis had opened their membership to women, providing additional avenues for leadership and service. Retired Western Washington

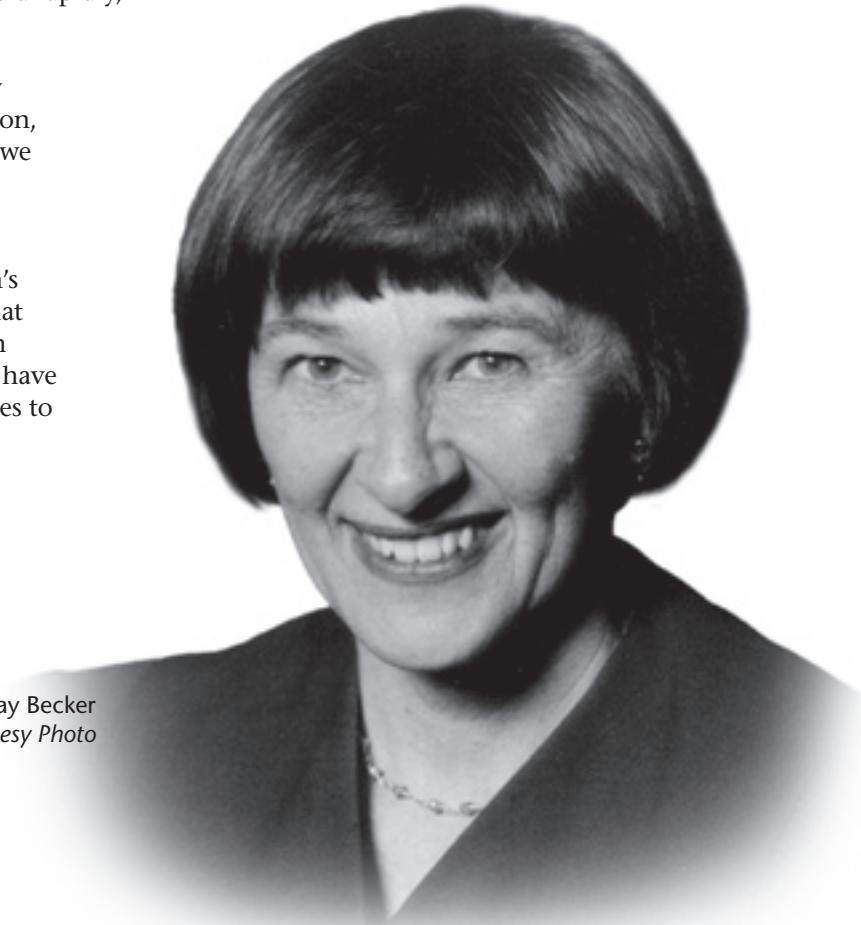
University administrator Mary Robinson, who was YWCA board president in 1972 and continues as a life-long supporter of the YWCA and member of the advisory Board of Trustees, became the second woman inducted into the Bellingham Rotary Club in 1987.

Nationally, women were talking about the “glass ceiling,” wearing big-shouldered “power suits” to the office, and reading self-help books offering advice on “how to have it all without breaking,” as the role of women in the workplace increased dramatically. Having a career often meant adding another set of responsibilities and challenges to family life since most women still had primary responsibility for family care and housework. Bulky day-planners to keep track of a busy schedule sold rapidly, and time management workshops proliferated.

“Getting women to serve on the board became very difficult,” noted Elsie Heinrick at the oral history session, although Anne Rose added, “it was a big honor when we were young.”

Former executive director Dorothy Culjat sees the changes in board recruitment as a function of women’s empowerment. “So many women were focusing at that time on helping themselves, they didn’t have as much time. Still, for many women, it was their first time to have discretionary funds. Women with careers had resources to support the YW in ways they couldn’t before”

If you look at the composition of boards over time, she adds, in the early days, they were wives of prominent businessmen and professionals for the most part, with some faculty women from what is now Western Washington University. “We didn’t recruit that way. It didn’t matter who you were or who your husband was.” In the 1980s, “there was a bit of a blend,” she notes. By the 1990s, few were on the board because of their husbands’ positions in the community.<sup>3</sup>



Mary Kay Becker  
*Courtesy Photo*



Esther Dandaura, an exchange student from Nigeria studying for a degree in environmental studies at Western Washington University's Huxley College, liked the YWCA's "appealing international flavor." After finishing her degree, she planned to return to Nigeria to work with the government in environmental and freshwater planning.

*Bellingham Herald, November 21, 1981, YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

## “The House on the Hill Changes Its Image”

During the mid-1970s, the “oil shock” of gas shortages and high prices, as OPEC and other oil producing countries tightened supplies, began to affect the national economy severely. There was inflation, coupled with a stagnating economy and an increasing unemployment rate. “Stagflation” was the result, and it was a condition that President Jimmy Carter struggled with unsuccessfully. At the same time, some of the hopefulness and idealism of the anti-poverty programs had waned.

Ronald Reagan’s election as president in 1980 ushered in a revival of conservative religious and political values as well as an avowed goal of rolling back the “War on Poverty” and various social programs. Feeling that federal government was too big and intrusive, he slashed social programs. In 1982, there was a deep national recession, although recovery followed a year later<sup>1</sup>. His famous “Morning in America” ad, developed for his 1984 reelection campaign, evoked both the cheery image of people heading off to work in the morning and the promise of prosperous times after the steep inflation of the ‘70s. The assurances of jobs, marriage and home-buying were reminiscent of the postwar 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

At the YWCA, the period of expansion was followed by a marked decrease in federal, state or local grant funding for social programs initiated in the 70s as well as job-training positions paid for by federal CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, 1973) grants, resulting in fewer staff. Funding for many of the programs initiated at the YWCA in the 70s dried up although some were taken over by other institutions and agencies. Programs such as the residence for the mentally ill and the Women’s Job Center were phased out or, in some cases, ended abruptly when federal, state or local funding disappeared.

Among the 1981 residents was Joanne Savora, “a petite, agile woman with a propensity for gossip,” who had lived at several YWCAs before moving to Bellingham. Illness left her short of money and weakened to about 80 pounds. Moving to the affordable YWCA was a feasible alternative to trying to survive on her own.”

*Bellingham Herald, November 21, 1981, YWCA Collection,  
WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

As attitudes changed, there was also less demand for the kind of women-only affordable haven for new arrivals or visitors that had been present since YWCA residences were established. A reflection of this change came in 1981 when the most famous residence for “generations of proper young women making their way in the big city,” the Barbizon Hotel for Women in New York City, opened its doors to male residents and was converted to a luxury hotel seven years later.

As the *Bellingham Herald* described in a November 21, 1981 article “YWCA – The House on the Hill Changes Its Image,” the residents became primarily a mixture of international students and financially pressed older women who stayed for extended periods.





Resident Patricia Feldman was “looking for a quiet place” when she moved from California to the YWCA in 1981. Financially, it was a solution to her problems and a “hopeful” place to stay while she attended Cascade Business School to become a legal secretary.

*Bellingham Herald, November 21, 1981, YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

Noting the diversity among the women, *Herald* reporter Grace Reamer wrote, “. . . the YWCA has become more student-oriented, a place where friendships blossom and the old and young learn from each other.” She described the “subdued yet welcoming atmosphere seep[ing] through the ancient trees and box hedges that guard the sloping lawns surrounding the old, brick YWCA building. Somewhat like a college dormitory, small rooms line long dim hallways and residents of each floor share a kitchen, bathroom and cleaning duties.”<sup>3</sup>

Three sisters who had escaped by boat from South Vietnam were part of the group then living at the YWCA. Tran Luc, the eldest at 35, was responsible for supporting the family. She worked full time at Bellingham Frozen Foods and also held a part-time job as a kitchen assistant at the China Delight restaurant. Buu, 30, took bookkeeping classes at Bellingham Technical College. All three were working hard to learn English. Of Chinese heritage, they were skilled in Cantonese and Vietnamese cooking, contributing tantalizing dishes to the monthly potluck dinners prepared by the residents.

Vietnamese refugee Tran Luc eats Chinese food in a YWCA kitchen. In later years, Tran Luc married the owner of the China Delight restaurant, and they had two daughters, both of whom have graduated from Western Washington University.

*Bellingham Herald*, November 21, 1981,  
Courtesy of Alice Richards.

Several international students from Western Washington University were also in residence. Annalise Ljunggren, Swedish, blonde and blue-eyed, enjoyed the diverse company of the other residents. Caroline Wong, French with Asian heritage from the island of Mauritius, was studying French and business at the university. She was also learning to bake cinnamon rolls and other American food with her YWCA friends as teachers, among whom were older women such as Joanne Savora and Patricia Feldman.

Esther Dandaura, a Nigerian exchange student, was finishing an environmental studies degree at Western Washington University’s Huxley College and putting together a West African recipe book on the side. “There is a friendly atmosphere here,” commented Wong. Concluded Reamer, “the camaraderie between students and other residents was evident.”



## The Bellingham YWCA at 75

The YWCA's international program emphasis had been strengthened and its scope broadened by the formation of the YWCA World Wise Task Force in 1979, a coalition of women from Western Washington University, the YWCA and the local United Nations Association. Led by Liz Partolan, a board member and coordinator for the university's Student Life Program, its goal was "to develop cross-cultural awareness and appreciation through various programs, forums and cooperative efforts of the community, international and ethnic minority students and local ethnic groups."

The 1981-82 series of World Wise programs featured an International Students Reception at the university; a Middle-Eastern evening with dinner and a Bou Saada Dance Troupe performance, a cross-cultural communication training workshop, a slide show about the Micronesian island of Yap with "tropical refreshments," a Malaysian dinner with slides,

music and dance, and a dinner celebrating the Japanese Plum Blossom Festival. Members of the Task Force included program director Alice Richards, board president Shirley Murray, and board members Dorothy Giesecke and Sonja Sweek.

Many classes and swimming lessons continued to be offered throughout the decade. A popular synchronized swimming class for 10- to 16-year olds, taught by Diana Ward, was known as the "Mermaids." "I call it water ballet because people understand that. And that's what it is," said Ward in an April 27, 1982 *Bellingham Herald* interview. Added "mermaid" Jill Flanburg, "I've had to work harder to strengthen my stomach and thigh muscles than when I was on the YMCA swim team." The group gave public performances to show off their water ballet skills and grace.

The Mermaids were just one of many groups that Ward led from 1977 until a degenerative disease forced the former champion swimmer to retire in 1989. Among others, she taught Red Cross certification classes, helped ENCORE program breast-cancer survivors build muscles and confidence, conducted classes for Lummi youngsters and supervised Moms and Tots swims. A favorite swimmer was retired shoemaker Alf Lanseth, who quit her senior citizen sessions after his 100th birthday because he was getting "a little old" to swim laps. He died at 103.

At the 1982 annual meeting, the YWCA celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Diamond Jubilee with a witty fashion show. Written and narrated by board president Shirley Murray, the performance cleverly illustrated the organization's 75 years of history and the changes in women's lives – and dress – through that time. Among the participants were Phyllis Jones, dressed in a turn-of-the-century duster, portraying a woman about to be rescued by Miss Belyea, the Travelers Aide who met the trains and steamers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Angie Counter, attired in a counter-culture outfit signifying 1960s and 70s social protest.

Shelley Muzzy of the Bou Saada Dance Troupe performed at the Middle Eastern evening at the YWCA on November 21, 1981.

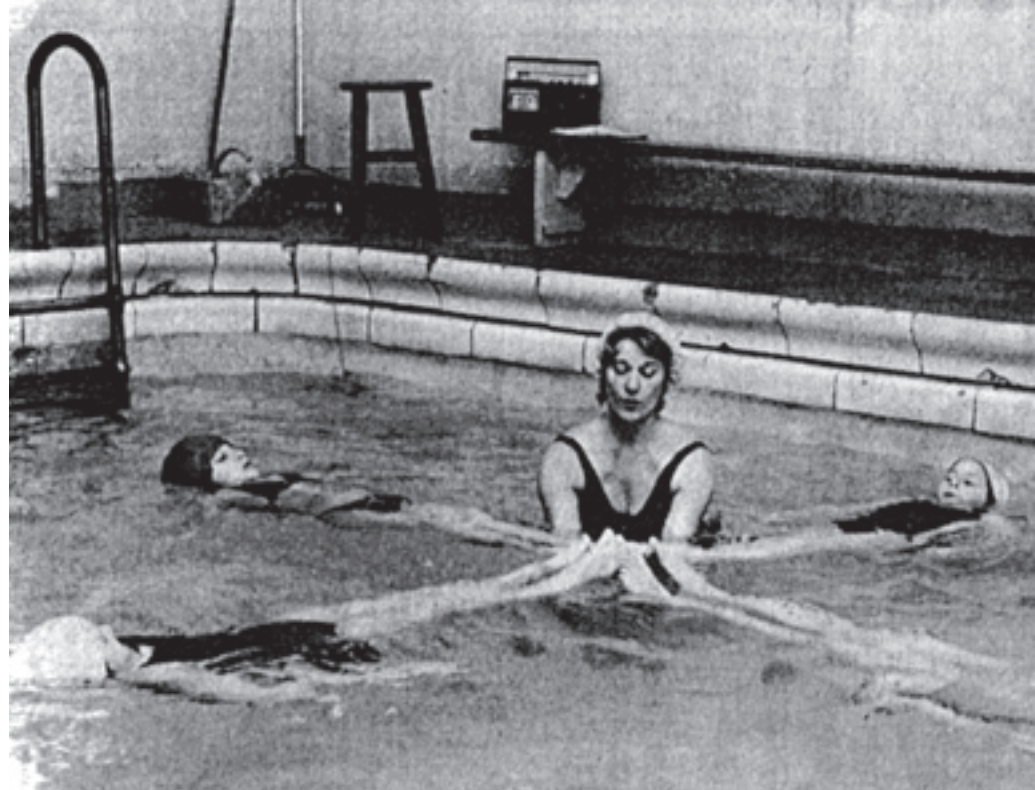
*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*





“We have come a long way since our local YWCA board urged businesses in the community to provide comfortable stools for its women workers in recognition of their natural frailty,” Murray commented.

She concluded, “We have had a long history of looking at problems and finding ways to solve them. Though the problems have changed, and our responses to them are far more aggressive than when YWCA prayer circles were formed as a way of righting wrongs, one thing has never changed: the attitude of respect and support for any women or girl, whatever her situation, wherever she may be in the world. Those of us who have traveled abroad have discovered this blessing at YWCAs everywhere, and we cherish it.”<sup>1</sup>



(Top) Members of the Mermaids form spokes around their instructor, Diana Ward. Pictured clockwise from bottom left are Elizabeth St. James, Jill Flanburg, Pam Raade and Gwendolyn Peyton, 1982.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*

(Bottom) “On the Move,” the YWCA’s 75th anniversary fun run and walk, was held at Lake Padden on May 8, 1982. Participants’ dress was a far cry from the sports costumes of the early 1900s.

*YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.*



# A Long Period of Transition Begins

The year 1982 brought celebration but also a budget crisis sparked by severe funding cuts, inflated operating expenses, a \$10,000 budget deficit and a 67-year-old facility desperately in need of remodeling and repair.

Accordingly, a fundraising project was developed in conjunction with the Diamond Jubilee to help ameliorate the situation. Executive director Dorothy Culjat and board president Shirley Murray announced a plan to involve 200 of the YWCA's 1,200 members to organize special events, do volunteer maintenance and staff a phone tree to ask members for contributions. These efforts were combined with an organizational assessment by the staff to explore the YWCA direction.

"The economic crisis has brought everything to a screeching halt, and it is now time in this, our 75th anniversary, to look at where we want to go for the next 75 years," said Culjat in a *Bellingham Herald* interview.<sup>1</sup>

Loss of \$130,000 in federal grant aid and a potential reduction in United Way support had resulted in a major staff reorganization the previous year, which had protected the budget somewhat. However, increasing utility bill costs because of higher rates, much-needed remodeling of two bathrooms and replacement of an antiquated heating boiler were looming. A \$30,000 grant from the Washington State Historic Preservation program in 1980 had helped. But a \$25,000 grant to redo the bathrooms still left \$3,000 needed to complete the project. The 1982 United Way allocation was \$39,000, down over \$6,000 from the previous year.<sup>2</sup> Membership dues remained at \$15 annually, reflecting a strong commitment to keep them affordable for all women.

The board developed an "Adopt a Room" program to refurnish some of the residence. The Lions Club, Soroptimists and many other groups and individuals helped. "Little by little we got many of the rooms fresh and clean with a plaque on the door to honor the donors," says Culjat in a recent oral history interview.<sup>3</sup>

The board discussed possible closer cooperation with the YMCA and even whether to sell the beloved YWCA building. Fortunately, solutions were found, and the YWCA still occupies its historic "home on the hill," but this decade and the next were a time of budgetary troubles and continuing assessment of the changing needs of women and how the YWCA could continue to best serve the greatest needs of the women in its community.

At the annual meeting in February 1986, board president Barbara Unger reported that executive director Dorothy Culjat had resigned and Sharon (Quigley) Kingsley would step in as interim director. The top priorities for the organization were fundraising and programming. The 1985 President's Campaign goal was \$10,000 of which \$5,000 had been raised by December, including donations from members, friends and those who used the swimming pool.

The three remaining lots south of the YWCA had been placed on the market, listed at \$120,000, and were re-listed in August 1986.<sup>4</sup> Still, the board had a full complement of 25 members and programming, Unger reported, had been maintained.

The years 1985 and 1986 were especially difficult financially as staff and board struggled with deficits. Members continued with fundraising events to attract members and other women of the community. The popular golf tournament, begun in the 1960s to promote golfing opportunities for women, continued, as did the Red Stocking Tea.

Culjat and board member Pat Hite began a luncheon series in the fall of 1983 with Governor John Spellman and future Governor Booth Gardner as speakers. They developed a committee of women who were active in the community and asked each to "captain" a table of subscribers. Subsequent speakers included Penny Harrington, the first female police chief in the nation, from Portland, Oregon, and University of Washington humanities professor Giovanni Costigan. Offering timely topics and speakers, the series has continued in various forms since.

Rummage sales, a Theater Night event, and monthly contributions from the Y's Buys thrift store helped with ongoing expenses.

The tide appeared to turn in 1987 with supplemental funding of \$5,500 from the United Way, whittling the deficit down to \$900 from \$3,000 the previous year. Major repairs to the boiler had been done and an expanded telephone system installed. An \$8,000 grant for the needed new roof had been secured. At the 1988 annual meeting February 23, the guest speaker was Molly Malone, who had been named the 1987 Whatcom County Businesswomen of the Year, typifying the change in women's lives in general over the decade.

At the February 21, 1989 annual meeting, outgoing board president Trish Navarre reported that The Other Bank to help low-income families obtain hygiene and other non-food products had opened in January. "We are offering more classes than we've offered in three years," she added. "Our ad in the [Bellingham Herald's] *Leisure Guide* produced excellent results, and our classes are full," she announced. Y's Buys store moved to Old Town and continued to contribute monthly checks. United Way sent the full request of \$30,000.

"Financially we are doing the best we've done in four years," Navarre concluded. "We are now \$4,000 above budget. We have no deficit. Our membership is up, and our fundraisers bring in more money than ever. We have gone from just surviving, to really be able to contribute to the community."<sup>5</sup>

Her optimism was relatively short-lived.

## Alice Richards

### *Satisfactions of service*

Alice Richards, YWCA deputy director and residence director from 1969 to 1982, treasures enduring friendships she made during that time. She feels her years at the YWCA were enriching ones, broadening her outlook on the world and its issues.

She had the opportunity to attend national conferences and a World YWCA conference in Athens. Working and married after high school, she was encouraged to continue her education at Whatcom Community College and Western Washington University where she received a master's degree in anthropology in 1986. "I wanted to study about women," she said. Her master's thesis focused on Vietnamese refugee Tran Luc, who lived at the YWCA in the early 80s. Richards keeps in touch with that family, including Tran's two sisters and two daughters.

An avid golfer, she helped start the first golf tournament and played in all of them through 2003. She started a YWCA evening group for golfers, called "Swingers," which is still active at the Lake Padden golf course.

"The YWCA had so many connections in the community," she muses. "I learned about so many things, met so many people. The Y helped me, too, and I need to give back," she says of her continued support. <sup>6</sup>

*Photo by Kelly Heese.*



## Red Ink Leads to a New Focus

By the 1990s, American women were leading very different lives than they did in the 1950s and earlier. These dramatic changes during recent decades were having an impact on many volunteer organizations throughout the country.

Middle-class women, who had been the mainstays of volunteer programs, were busy balancing employment and family. By 1990, the number of working women had risen from just under a third to about half of the workforce. Moreover, women had greater opportunities for housing, education, career development, recreation and volunteer community service to compete for their energies.

These factors, coupled with ongoing financial crises, produced a reassessment of the Bellingham YWCA's role in the community that would result in today's focus on transitional housing for single women – a responsibility that would help meet the most pressing needs of the community. But the road was long and hard for the YWCA leadership.

The up-and-down slide into financial red ink, battled so strenuously in the late 80s, continued into the next decade despite heroic efforts on the part of the board to raise funds through events, grants and gifts. As former executive director Dorothy Culjat says, "It took so much energy and time to raise small amounts of money. We needed much larger amounts." <sup>1</sup>

Board minutes reflect a continuous preoccupation with deficits, money-raising activities, building repairs and ways to tighten up expenditures. Months when the budget report reflected a positive balance were occasions for optimism, but they were few; shortfalls mounted. The necessity of installing computers added additional stress and expense as did rising utilities costs, lack of a stable funding source, and an aging building in need of repair and refurbishing.

In 1990, the ENCORE cancer support program petered out, to be revived again for a few years in 1992, and the board decided not to hold the traditional Red Stocking Tea. The United Way contribution of \$38,500 was \$4,600 short of the request. Since single women today have many more

independent housing options than a century, or even half a century earlier, the YWCA residence was becoming more and more a place for emergency housing or longer-term housing for low-income women.

Still, successful programs such as the Displaced Homemaker Program, a three-week class for women who needed to reenter the workforce after divorce, widowhood or domestic abuse, ran in conjunction with Whatcom and Skagit Valley community colleges. This program still continues at Whatcom Community College.<sup>2</sup>

The quarterly luncheon series was well-attended, with speakers on family life, empowerment and health. The 1992-93 series included topics such as "Humor in the Workplace," "More Alike than Different" with Lee Bussard who spoke about his experiences with cerebral palsy, and "Ethics in Everyday Life." There was also a "Straight Talk for Women" evening series at the YWCA.

Several programs were devoted to the well-being of teenage girls. Members of the Soroptimist women's service organization donated \$3,000 for the CHOICES program, to help high school girls make good career and life choices, an issue of concern to both the Soroptimists and members of the YWCA.

In 1993, the United Way gave the YWCA an extra \$5,000 to assist with a Shadow Program, pairing young women for a day or longer with professional women to see what real job experience was like. In that same year, the national YWCA began the SMART (Science, Math and Related Technology) program to encourage young girls to pursue these areas of study in school; the local YWCA offered the program.

Fundraisers like the annual "Salute" auction, the Golf Tournament and donations helped, as did a \$30,000 gift in 1988 to the local YWCA Foundation by 1990-91 board president Dorothy Giesecke and her husband, Ray. The annual "Leadership Breakfast," begun in the mid-90s, proved an increasingly successful fundraiser and popular community event showcasing women of achievement speaking on contemporary topics.

The Y's Buys shop's contributions ebbed and flowed during the late 1980s. A move to Commercial Street from Prospect resulted in increased rent and lower income. The next move to Holly Street in Old Town boosted revenues for a while, especially with a new paid part-time manager, but over time not as much as was hoped. In 1992, the board decided to close the Y's Buy shop, liquidate the inventory with a July garage sale, and transition the shop's management and income to Lydia Place, a shelter for homeless women with children that opened in 1989. In July 1992, the store's name was changed to Wise Buys; it continues to be staffed by Lydia Place volunteers.

The Other Bank program was transitioned to the Salvation Army in 1996.

By 1996, the YWCA was in severe financial difficulty. With \$100,000 in debt accumulated over four years, new executive director Shannon Eberhart was forced to lay off most of the staff 10 days after beginning her job in October 1996. "Having to come in and lay off women was almost as much as I could handle," she told the *Bellingham Herald*.<sup>3</sup> "I wanted the organization to be a model of equity, fairness and a model employer for women."

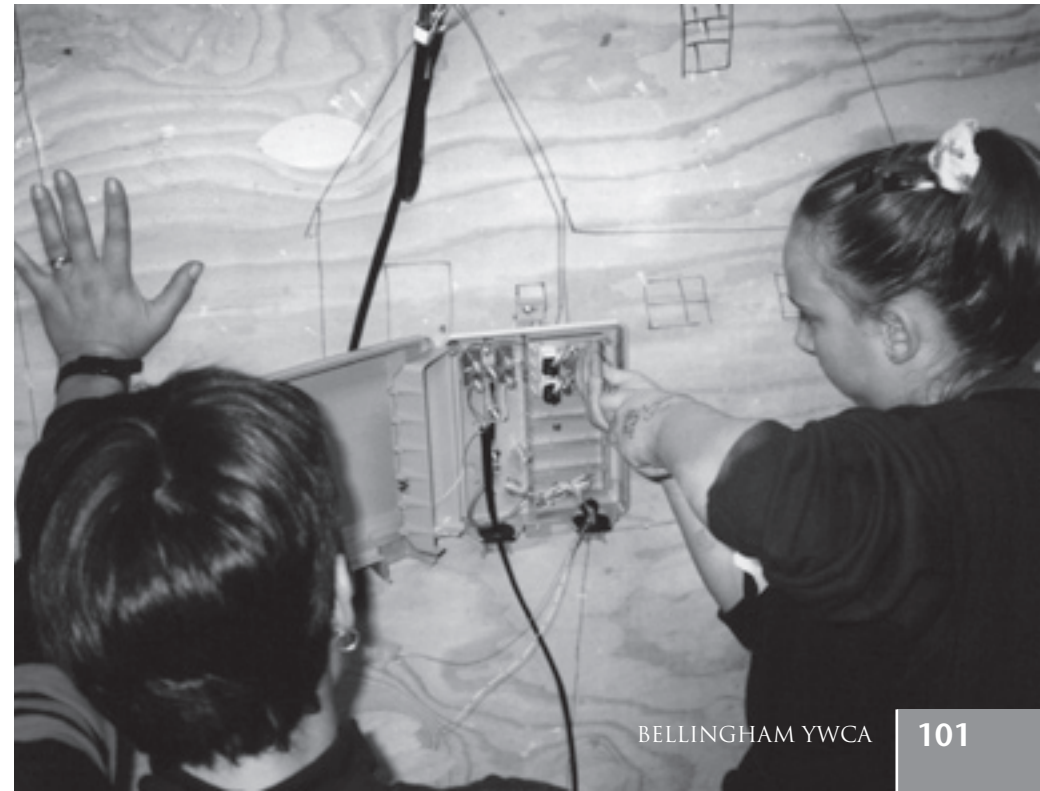
Eberhart called upon the 10-member board to promise to raise \$5,000 each by February 1997, to develop a "passion plan" to explore the reasons why they became involved in the organization and develop an action plan pivoting on those reasons. Board members responded by raising nearly \$19,000 by the end of February and continued their efforts throughout the year. In September 1997, board president Julie Foster read a letter from United Way, which had reviewed the YWCA's 1997 funding, that assured the organization that support would continue through the rest of the year and endorsed efforts to get the YW back on track.<sup>4</sup>

Still, there was frustration, exhaustion and anger about the magnitude of the problems: the mounting deficit, the staff lay-offs and confusion about how these had come about. Other staff and board members resigned. By March 1997, the board was down to eight members, and the two remaining staff focused their efforts on taking care of the residents. From service clubs to Whatcom Community College's non-credit evening classes, other organizations and agencies were providing opportunities for women's energies.

It was time for drastic action. But, even as the board reassessed current programs, YWCA women were becoming valuable collaborators in new community service projects.

A volunteer U.S. West technician demonstrates wiring a telephone junction box as part of the SMART science and technology discovery program for middle-school girls.

*Photo by SMART coordinator Sally Manifold.*



## Closing the Pool

With sadness and reluctance, the board members decided in February 1996 that it was necessary to close the beloved YWCA swimming pool. The pool was small by contemporary standards and had become very expensive to heat and sanitize on a daily basis. Draining and cleaning had revealed cracks in the bottom and the need for major repairs. With the organization in deep financial straits, bringing the pool up to current health and safety codes, at an estimated cost of up to \$500,000 was unaffordable.

Still, with such strong feelings about what the pool meant to so many, board and staff discussions about restoring it in some form continued for at least the next five years.

When the YWCA opened in 1915, “it was the Cadillac of pools,” said former board member Pat Hite recently.<sup>1</sup> For nearly 80 years, it had been used by girls and boys and women of all ages as they learned to swim, earned Red Cross lifesaving certificates, mastered the art of synchronized swimming or kept fit through water aerobic exercises or swimming laps.

State Senator Harriet Spanel remembers learning to swim there as an adult. “Growing up on a farm in Iowa, I didn’t learn to swim as a child,” she recalled in a recent interview. “The pool was a wonderful opportunity.”<sup>2</sup>

“It was painfully difficult to close the chapter on a facility with so many memories for several generations of community people,” says current executive director and former board member Julie Foster. But by this time, she explains, “the aging pool had become outdated and much too costly to maintain. By then, there were other, more modern, community swimming facilities available.”<sup>3</sup>



Moms and tots splash in the pool.

*Photo courtesy of Alice Richards*

## Dorothy Place

Although struggling with financial issues, YWCA women, together with women from other agencies and groups, were making plans to respond to the social service community's desire to help women in crisis.

As far back as 1984, then-executive director Dorothy Culjat had reported that an assessment of community needs had reiterated as priorities women's employment opportunities, job and job search skills, and housing for women in transition.<sup>1</sup> Toward the end of that decade, several board members had become keenly involved in developing two other homes for women needing safe housing and help in building new, self-sufficient lives. Special concerns were safe havens for women with families who were homeless or escaping domestic violence, the latter an issue that the YWCA had brought to wider attention in the 1970s.

Lydia Place opened in 1989 to provide shelter for homeless women and children, led by Church Women United, whose board of directors included former YWCA board presidents Shirley Murray and Marie Hammer as well as long-time community volunteer, Bess Christman. By 1995, the shelter had served over 180 women and children in its 16-bed facility. In that year, Murray and Hammer wrote to the board suggesting a possible merger between Lydia Place and the YW, hoping to jointly manage the two residences with paid administrators, since Lydia Place was operating with volunteers at that time.

Three years before, Lydia Place had assumed management of Wise Buys thrift store, formerly Y's Buys, so the two organizations had a history of cooperation and a shared concern about women in need. However, at the September 28, 1995 board meeting, the executive committee of the YW suggested postponing action on the proposal. In addition to its own ongoing financial difficulties, the YWCA was deeply involved in planning a major transitional housing project for women with children who were survivors of domestic violence.

A Dorothy Place resident looks to a bright future for herself and her children.

*Photo by Troy Wayrynen, 2005, courtesy of the Vancouver Columbian.*



In the late 80s, Dorothy Giesecke and others became very interested in building a second residence adjacent to the current YWCA on the three lots still owned by the organization. By the mid-1990s, plans for the YWCA Transitional Housing Project had progressed to the point that the board and building committee were consulting architects, exploring grant and low-income housing loan possibilities and meeting regularly with City of Bellingham staff, Womencare Shelter board members, and the Opportunity Council staff.<sup>2</sup>

Founded as a volunteer organization in 1965 to serve homeless and low-income individuals and families, the Opportunity Council was a product of the 1964 federal Economic Opportunity Act. It has grown since to serve more than 18,000 people in need each year in Whatcom, San Juan and Island counties with a full- and part-time staff of 175 and funding from government agencies as well as private donations.



By 1997, the City and the Opportunity Council were moving ahead with the project, with the YWCA executive director, board president and vice-president represented on the multi-agency committee. However, the YWCA board was beginning to reassess the financial and fund-raising impact of committing to running the new building's operations.

In April 1997, executive director Shannon Eberhart, who was managing the YWCA's financial turn-around plan, recommended pulling out of the new project as an operating partner. The YWCA board and staff, she urged, needed to focus on its financial situation and basic operations. In May, the YWCA board began talks with the Opportunity Council about taking over the rest of the project, by then named the Dorothy Arnold Giesecke Place Domestic Violence Transitional Housing Project, after that resolute champion of women in need, who sadly had passed away in February.

Over the next few months, the three lots were appraised for \$175,000. They were sold to the Opportunity Council for \$75,000 in cash and \$100,000 as a YWCA donation to the transitional housing project, a significant contribution to the project and the beginning step toward financial stability for the YW.

Construction on the new building began, financed primarily by the Washington State Housing Trust and local and federal low-income housing grants and loans.

Dorothy Place opened in April 1998 with 21 apartments for women and children, survivors of domestic violence who receive support services over as much as two years to help them recover from the past and create new futures. The unwieldy working name had been abbreviated before the opening. Over time, the project has received support from private foundations, religious communities, nonprofit organizations, service clubs, businesses, government and individuals and continues to help women with children transition to lives free from domestic violence.

Americorps volunteers construct the playground at Dorothy Place.

*Photo courtesy of the Opportunity Council*



## Dorothy Arnold Giesecke

*A "spiritual leader" in challenging times*

"Each of us has a thread which runs through our lives and keeps reappearing. For me it is the YWCA." Dorothy Giesecke wrote these words in a birthday greeting to Diana Ward whom Dorothy recruited as a swimming instructor and ENCORE cancer recovery program leader shortly after Diana's arrival in Bellingham in 1977.

In 1930, at 12, Dorothy Arnold joined the YWCA as a member of Girls Reserve, which had been formed during World War I to aid in the war effort but endured as a character-building program for adolescent girls. Her first job after college was on the staff of the Washington, D.C., YWCA working with teenage girls, including 3,000 Girl Reserves in schools throughout the city. A fond memory was getting First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to attend one of the conferences she arranged.

When World War II came, she joined the Red Cross, serving in the Pacific Theater and, after the war, in Japan. It was in the Pacific that she met Ray Giesecke from Bellingham and became a close friend of his family as she continued to pursue a career that included 16 years on the Goucher College faculty and teaching at Johns Hopkins University while spending her free time as an active Baltimore YWCA member and board president.

After the death of Ray's first wife, he and Dorothy were married in 1970, and she joined the Western

Washington State College counseling staff, working for the legendary Dean of Students Bill McDonald. Following a lifetime path, she joined the YWCA, becoming board chair and interim volunteer executive director during the early 1990s, a period of great financial stress for the organization.

Whether wielding a gavel or a paint brush, she set an example of energetic "hands-on" leadership and dedication that earned the board's accolade as "our spiritual leader." Dorothy Giesecke died from cancer in February 1997, two months before ground was broken for a new residence for families beginning new lives after domestic violence under the aegis of the Opportunity Council. Because she was instrumental in its creation, it was named Dorothy Place.

"When our life is drawing to a close," she wrote in a high school essay, "If we look back and can say we've done everything possible to achieve our goal, and have helped our friends when the necessity arose, we can truly say we have had a successful life." She lived that credo throughout her 79 years to the benefit of all whose lives she touched.



Dorothy Arnold Giesecke  
with a neighbor's son.

*Courtesy of Ray Giesecke*



Marge E. Edais-Yeltatzie (right) whose health problems brought her to the YWCA, enjoys tea with friends, including operations manager Janet Marino, 2007.

*Photo by Kelly Heese.*

## Help for New Lives

In recent decades, community organizations of all kinds have gone through periods of extensive self-study and reorganization as they adapted to rapidly accelerating social change during the last part of the 20th century. Their numbers have grown dramatically; nonprofits registered with the Washington Secretary of State increased from slightly less than 32,000 in 1994 to nearly 40,000 by 1999 and in 2007 reached more than 55,000. There are hundreds in Whatcom County alone.

Reassessment of how best to achieve the YWCA mission of meeting the most urgent needs of Whatcom County women began in earnest during the mid-1990s. “The organization must define its niche in the community and fill that niche,” Shannon Eberhart told the board during her time as executive director in 1996-97.<sup>1</sup>

By fall 1997, Eberhart had resigned as executive director but was still acting as an executive consultant to restore financial stability. In her recommendations for a phased growth and development plan, presented to the board on October 1, 1997, she emphasized that the YWCA of Bellingham was founded 90 years ago to provide safe, inexpensive housing for single women. That was no longer a viable option for the YWCA’s financial health.

She also raised the issue of the YWCA’s membership focus: “Is the YWCA of Bellingham a membership organization, whose focus is serving members,” she asked, “or is the YWCA a social service organization that women support through their membership?” Over most of the century, she maintained, the YWCA had been both at various times, but in recent decades had veered more in the former than the latter direction.

She went on to enumerate the strong support from the service community and city for women’s housing, the long history of YWCA under-funding, the deferred maintenance on the building, and the needs of the women in the residence program for skills building, counseling and case management.

Eberhart recommended redefining the local organization’s core purpose as transitional services for women in crisis, with shelter and self-sufficiency the outcomes. With three floors of residential housing in an existing building and a tradition of offering affordable housing to women, the YWCA was well positioned for that role.

In 1998, a focus group comprised of 18 women from other organizations such as Brigid Collins House, Lummi Victims of Crime, the Opportunity Council, Zonta and Soroptimists, together with representatives of public agencies plus 15 YWCA members and volunteers, reiterated the needs that Culjat’s survey of the 1980s and Eberhart’s recommendations had revealed.

Locally, the group agreed, the primary need was for safe, affordable transitional housing for women. Closely related problems were lack of livable wages, poverty, domestic abuse and low self-esteem. Mental health and substance abuse issues were increasing. Many women needed more education and job training. There was also a lack of awareness among those who needed them most about access to existing community support services.

In 1998, the board made the crucial decision to focus on developing programming for emergency and transitional housing and support for women in crisis. But it also continued to concentrate on financial matters and, with the help of a Whatcom Community Foundation grant, drew up a strategic plan as well as grant applications to bring the residence into compliance with health and safety codes, and prepare three floors for transitional housing while retaining the building’s historic character.

As the board discussed the new direction, another Adopt-A-Room campaign in 1998 brought in community help to refurbish rooms that needed immediate attention. Horizon Bank, the Aftermath Club, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, and others adopted one or more rooms for painting and refurbishing. The Bellingham Sunrise Rotary carried out a make-over of the fourth floor alcoves which would eventually become short-term emergency housing.

As they worked to build new lives for women in need, the YWCA was rebuilding its own.

A key to financial stability has been adherence to business principles. In the past, says former board president and executive director since 1998 Julie Foster, nonprofits have had a strong focus on programming but perhaps less so on the business aspects of keeping the organization going. “If a nonprofit is run as a business, it works better for everyone,” she believes.

In recent years, nonprofits have had to become much more sophisticated about the business side of their organizations, she says.<sup>2</sup> Partly this is because of increased competition for donations and the exacting standards of grant providers, which they depend upon for a substantial portion of their budgets.

In 1998 and 1999, the late Teri Smith, who was residence director, began helping residents, some of whom had lived at the YWCA for up to 15 years, arrange other housing during the renovation. Says Foster, “Teri was wonderful with them.”

Beginning in 2000, the three upper floors underwent a \$1.6 million renovation, using a combination of public housing grants and a capital campaign. The Washington State Housing Trust Fund, City of Bellingham, Gates Foundation and federal funds provided much of the financing. The renovation included installation of an elevator, funded by the Boeing Company, to make the building more accessible to the disabled and elderly. The Bellingham Rotary Club contributed \$15,000 to the campaign.

When the updated residence reopened in 2001, “there was a clean break between low-cost ongoing housing and emergency and transitional housing,” Foster says. That year also marked a new chapter in the history of the Bellingham YWCA and in the lives of the more than 100 women each year who have benefited from the program.

In a sense, both here and nationally, the organization had come full circle.

The YWCA was founded in the United States in 1855 to provide safe housing, employment counseling and a wholesome environment for women. Today’s focus on helping single women in crisis is a contemporary response to that original mission. Says current board president Jo Collinge, “After a period, especially in the 60s, 70s and 80s, of meeting women’s needs for self-fulfillment, leadership training and empowerment, the YWCA, locally and throughout the country, has returned to where we started: helping women to build, and rebuild, their lives.”

Applicants for the 27 modest-fee single rooms in the transitional program and nine alcove beds for 90-day free emergency housing are interviewed by housing director Ann Suloway before being accepted into the program. If they have mental health needs or substance-abuse issues, they must have received, and must continue, treatment.

Each resident prepares a written plan for her future that Suloway regularly reviews, encouraging her progress and referring her to agencies that can give her the kind of help she needs. “We take each individual where she is and try to help her move toward her own solutions,” Suloway says. Although women in the transitional program can stay for up to 18 months while they work to establish a solid footing for their lives, the average stay in 2007 was about eight.

According to Foster, up to 50 percent of the residents have had domestic violence in their backgrounds. Up to 40 percent have a disability. Others have physical or mental health issues or are in recovery from substance abuse; some have a combination of issues; and some just have had bad luck. She has recently seen an increasing number of older women, already living on the financial edge, whose severe physical health problems have led to job and health insurance loss, financial crisis and homelessness.

Residents live in community, cooking together in shared kitchens on each of the three floors and supporting each other. “Mutual support is a huge part of getting our residents back on their feet. It’s common to have one person with a car take three or four others to the Food Bank,” says Suloway.<sup>3</sup>

“Also, community living is always a learning experience,” she adds. “It ties into what they need to be self sufficient: setting boundaries, getting along with others, learning how to access the services and support of the larger community. Many of our residents have made long-lasting friendships and continue to help each other after they leave.”

Over time, skill-building programs have been added such as healthy cooking on a budget through the Washington State University Extension Service. Volunteer Ariel Divina Libre is particularly adept at developing self-esteem and confidence-building activities with residents who have very little left after the jolts in their lives that have brought them to the YWCA.

In the late 1990s, board members developed a Financial Fitness program for residents to learn about budgeting, living within one’s means, managing a checking account and other basics. Today’s Financial Fitness program is staffed by community volunteers, some from local banks, and is the kind of one-on-one approach that has proved to work best. The YWCA hopes to expand it to serve low-income women in the community.

“Money is so befuddling to people, especially those who’ve never had much of it,” says Suloway. “It’s hard for them to talk about it, particularly in a group. A lot of our residents have let men manage their money or, if they were suffering domestic abuse, they weren’t allowed to,” she explains.

“It’s a whole different framework for women who come from a background of poverty,” says Suloway. “They haven’t managed money because they haven’t had money to manage and they don’t know what their rights are, especially with payday loans or collection agencies. We work on the basic arithmetic of how many hours someone has to work to earn enough for food, rent and necessities; how much it costs to eat out at fast food places instead of fixing a bag lunch; what it costs to take the bus or walk compared to taking a car. They are mentored to pay necessities first.

“If you don’t feel you have control over your life, you don’t feel you have control over your money and vice versa,” Suloway remarks. “Our objective is to give our residents the skills to achieve control over both.”

A former YWCA resident reviewed her plan for a new life with housing director Ann Suloway in 2007.

*Photo by Kelly Heese.*





Melissa Marino (right) and Leslie Wargo, volunteer director, discuss recent arrivals at the YWCA Back-to-Work Boutique that provides free donated clothing to low-income women seeking employment, 2007.

*Photo by Kelly Heese.*

## A Unique Boutique

First, even before the renovation began to transform the residential floors, came the Back-to-Work Boutique to help residents with professional clothing and accessories. While visiting the Wenatchee YWCA in 1997, board member Dee Stahl had learned of a “Working Wardrobe” program to aid unemployed women or those coming out of training programs secure suitable attire for job interviews or the first few weeks on the job. Stahl brought the idea to the Bellingham YWCA board and met with an enthusiastic response.

Housed in one residence room and stocked with a selection of donated business clothes, fashion accessories and shoes, the boutique had a “grand opening” on March 17, 1998. The Soroptimists had secured an \$8,000 grant to start the shop, to which the Burlington Coat Factory had given a number of coats and suits. Women’s groups and individuals provided clothing. Residents could choose outfits in consultation with volunteers who helped mentor them about appropriate business attire and preparing for job interviews.

After the building renovation was completed, the boutique was moved downstairs to the former pool dressing room and was serving not only residents but low-income women in the community. They make appointments with the YWCA receptionist to meet with volunteer consultants who help them select free working clothing. Every few months there is a “giveaway” of clothing held in the YWCA’s ballroom and open to anyone in the community.

By 2007, as many as 400 women a year were benefiting from the generosity of working women in the community who donate their gently used clothing and businesses that provide unsold new clothing and shoes. Women’s professional and business organizations such as Whatcom Women Lawyers and Whatcom Women in Business conduct clothing drives among their members for the boutique. “Every day,” says Operations Manager Janet Marino, “at least one person comes in with clothes for the boutique, usually more than one.”

Volunteers sort donations, stock the shelves and help the clients with their selections. They also encourage clients to take up to four outfits, enough to get them well launched in new jobs. “Something that surprised us at first,” says executive director Julie Foster, “was that we had to encourage the women who use the boutique to take more than one or two items. They were shy about accepting ‘such nice things.’ We had to talk some of them into taking what they really needed. We still do.”

Clothes from the boutique help give women the confidence to take an often frightening step into new lives. About a year ago, a 61-year-old Bellingham resident, who had been out of the workforce for 20 years, was overwhelmed and didn’t know what to wear for a job interview. “It was very daunting,” she said in a July 25, 2007 *Bellingham Herald* story. She made an appointment with boutique manager Leslie Wargo. “Leslie helped me with two different areas, “she said, “what would look good on me and what would look good for an interview. It was just fabulous. I had this personal attention.”

Said Wargo, “I know what it’s like. I’ve been a single mom. I’ve needed that help.”<sup>1</sup>

The latest boutique project offers prom dresses for teens. The program, which used to belong to Blue Skies for Children, has been passed to the YWCA. Gently used prom dresses, shoes, jewelry, handbags and other accessories are donated so that girls and young women will not have to let lack of money keep them from the dance.



Different from and yet committed to the same mission as their 1907 predecessors, the 2008 YWCA Board of Directors begins a second century of community service. First row (left to right): Whatcom Community College student career advisor Carla Gelwicks; BP wellness coordinator Michelle Zimberoff; Bellingham Housing Authority payroll technician and board treasurer Sherry Partlow; Blaine Elementary School principal Kathy Newport; Church of God pastor and vice president Jay Johnson; free-lance public relations professional and board secretary Annette Bagley.

Standing: Indian Child Welfare Services social worker and immediate past president Sharon Coss; paralegal for disability cases Varya Fish; businesswoman and volunteer Susan Palmer; retired public relations professional and president Jo Collinge; Allied Arts outreach coordinator Kristie Lundstrom; and WWU student academic support coordinator Joan Ullin.

*Photo by Kelly Heese.*



## Entering a Second Century

Women of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who campaigned for the vote, ventured outside the home to form literary clubs and service organizations, and urged community improvements they justified as “scrubbing beyond our backdoors” would be astounded by the changes in women’s lives at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup>. They would also see much continuity between their endeavors and those of today.

Like founders of other early women’s organizations, the women who launched the Bellingham YWCA in 1907 were neighbors who shared similar backgrounds and interests. They might be surprised by how much “the neighborhood” has grown and by the diversity of backgrounds now represented in today’s YWCA membership, but not by the role that shared goals play in meeting community needs.

In the early decades, the overlapping circles of Aftermath and Monday Club members, the Community Fund and supportive businessmen helped sustain fledging organizations. As the twentieth century drew to a close, it was women’s groups such as Soroptimists and the AAUW, together with the United Way and supportive businesses and service organizations like the Bellingham and Bellingham Sunrise Rotaries that helped the financially hard-pressed YWCA survive and begin to thrive.

Executive director since 1998, Julie Foster, refers to her “Old Girls Network” when she talks about the role that personal relationships and shared interests play in establishing support for nonprofit organizations. She also applauds the growing collaboration between like-minded groups in organizations such as the Homeless Coalition, of which the YWCA is a member, to address community concerns through coordinated approaches.

Volunteers are the life-blood of any nonprofit, and YWCA programs have benefitted from thousands over its 100 years. This was especially true during the financial crisis of the 90s, when the paid YWCA staff was reduced to one at most. Board members, including the then-board president Foster, performed as many duties as they could to keep curtailed services going.

Typifying the dedication of volunteers during the last decade, Foster says, are husband and wife, Diane and Vern Hagen. “I don’t know how we would have made it through the [2000-02] remodel [of the residential floors] without them,” she emphasizes.

Diane, a retired banker, helped get the Back-to-Work Boutique going, concluded six years on the board in 2008, and continues to help with the boutique and other projects. Vern, a retired community college dean, is a near-daily presence as the volunteer “Mr. Fix-It.” “Between them,” Foster notes, “they’ve logged thousands of hours. I often say if only a dollar were donated for each hour Diane and Vern have given, we’d have a tidy sum.”

Foster also salutes the crucial part that hundreds of board members and staff have played throughout the century in steering the organization through challenges and the changes that the shifting needs of women have compelled.

Founders of the Bellingham YWCA in 1907 received support from churches, businesses and the few other women’s groups existing at the time. They would be gratified by the outpouring of community support that marked the 2007-2008 centennial celebration.

In fall 2006, Rotary Club of Bellingham members contributed \$133,000 to finance the long-needed refurbishing of the ballroom and total remodeling of the outdated kitchen that promised greater community use of the historic building and increased rental income for the transitional housing program. A year later, proceeds from the launch party for Rotarian Brian Griffin’s book on Boulevard Park added \$4,000 to the total.<sup>1</sup>

An additional \$10,000 each came from Puget Sound Energy and the Whatcom Educational Credit Union for a media center essential to today’s business and community meetings. Donating their professional services for the renovation, completed in fall 2008, were interior designer Marilyn Mastor, Pat Rose, owner of Rose Construction, and Aaron Booker, owner of Hardline computer networking.



Helping 36 women at a time prepare themselves for new lives after a crisis, the YWCA staff of 2008 is comprised of (left to right) residence director Ann Suloway, office manager Karen Johnson, finance administrator Candy Caldwell, operations manager Janet Marino and 10-year executive director Julie Foster.

*Photo by Kelly Heese.*

Together with the earlier renovation of the residential floors, this brought the YWCA closer to its goal of fully meeting contemporary needs while maintaining the building's historic character. Grants are now being pursued to convert the disused pool area into office space and meeting rooms, freeing up two first-floor lounges for member, resident and community use, the original intent of the building's design.

Public awareness of the YWCA's history, mission and current focus was enhanced substantially before and during the year-long centennial celebration.

Whatcom Museum of History and Art mounted a photographic exhibit of YWCA history in November 2006 that ran through March of 2007. It drew hundreds of visitors and formed the basis for this more permanent book, a history that will also be shared through the Web sites of the Washington Women's History Consortium, which provided a grant for the publication, and WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.

Support from the *Bellingham Herald* included a substantial donation for the transitional housing program as well as editorial support, four opinion-page columns and several feature stories. Major stories also appeared in weekly and monthly publications, and all local media highlighted commemorative events. YWCA founding member, businesswoman and philanthropist, Frances Payne Larrabee, might well have smiled approvingly at the July 2008 *Northwest Business Monthly* article saluting nonprofits that operate on business principles with the YWCA as a prime example.

The year-long YWCA centennial celebration was officially launched at the June 8, 2007 Leadership Breakfast with a joint proclamation read by County Executive Pete Kremen and Bellingham City Councilwoman Louise Bjornson as well as greetings from U.S. Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, Governor Christine Gregoire and Congressman Rick Larsen.

Suffragettes would have been elated to see that outcome of their struggle.

Women and men who packed the Lakeway Inn ballroom heard about the sometimes forgotten trials of the suffrage movement from Washington Women's History Consortium coordinator Shanna Stevenson and a review of women in contemporary political life from Cathy Allen, founder of The Connections Group. This joint presentation tied together the past 100 years of women's history with achievements since then and the challenges still ahead for women in the political sphere.

A year before the centennial officially began, the YWCA revived the Red Stocking Tea, a cherished December event from the 1950s until the 90s. Candles glowed, silver gleamed, and a string quartet played. Older members were delighted at its return while younger women and residents enjoyed the holiday spirit, tasty refreshments and the "old-fashioned idea" of a formal tea. The renewed tradition continues as a reminder of the past and a way to forge new links with the community.

As the YWCA begins its second century in Bellingham, it continues its unswerving mission of empowering women. As board president Jo Collinge puts it: "The 1907 aim was building 'wholesome lives' for new arrivals in the city; today's program focus is helping women in crisis rebuild their lives."

Reflecting on a century in women's lives as seen through the prism of one community service organization, one is struck by the everyday dedication, hard work and determination shown by the women of the YWCA and the many others like them who have been at the heart of volunteer organizations.

In the words of YWCA executive director during the mid-1970s, Roseanna Stilwell Page, these are truly "ordinary women doing extraordinary things" to strengthen and empower other women – month after month, decade after decade for one hundred years.



# Continuing the Legacy of Leadership

*Northwest Women's Hall of Fame honorees 1999-2008*

During the decade since its founding in 1999, the YWCA Northwest Women's Hall of Fame has honored 39 contemporary women for outstanding community contributions in a wide variety of fields. Many have achieved in numerous endeavors. The listing below offers a glimpse of the varied contributions for which they have been recognized.

## 1999

**Miriam Barnett**  
*Director, Allied Arts*

**Anne Brown**  
*Founder, Whatcom Center for Early Learning*

**Juanita Jefferson**  
*Native American social services*

## 2000

**Bess Christman**  
*Church and community volunteer*

**Lynda Goodrich**  
*Athletic Director, Western Washington University*

**The late Violet Hillaire**  
*Lummi Aquaculture Project*

**Shirley Osterhaus**  
*Co-founder, Whatcom Human Rights Task Force*

## 2001

**Barbara Jimenez,**  
*Founder, Mother Baby Center*

**Sherry Jubilo**  
*Co-founder, Womencare Shelter and Food Co-op*

**Noriko Lao**  
*Local and international volunteer*

**The late Catharine "Kitty" Stimpson**  
*Civic leader and leadership mentor*

## 2002

**The late Jo Ann Choat**  
*Co-founder, Bellingham Food Bank*

**Fran James**  
*Nationally recognized Native American artist*

**Ellen Kester**  
*Co-founder/director, Sudden Valley Barn Theater*

**Barbara Osen**  
*Director, Tri-county Arthritis Foundation*

## 2003

**The late Bonnie Bergan**  
*Advocate for the developmentally disabled*

**Anne Hildebrand**  
*Co-founder, Mt. Baker Youth Symphony*

**Claire VanderGriend Thomas**  
*Lynden's "Mother of Music"*

## 2004

**Lois Garlick**  
*Environmental activist/educator*

**Sue Sharpe**  
*Motivator of community collaboration*

**Josselyn Winslow**  
*Co-founder, Alzheimer's Society*

## 2005

**Pat Fabiano**  
*Promoter of healthy communities*

**Joanne Gardner**  
*Co-founder, Laurendeau Foundation (for cancer care)*

**Wendy Scherrer**  
*Director, Northwest Salmon Enhancement Association*

**Marty Snyder**  
*Community Development Director, Opportunity Council*

## 2006

**Noémi Ban**  
*Holocaust survivor and educator*

**Jody Guenser & Pam Sinnett**  
*Founders, The Samish School*

**Karen Morse**  
*President, Western Washington University*

**The late Catherine Tally**  
*Lummi Nation leader*

## 2007

**Rosalinda Guillen**  
*Advocate for immigrants and farm workers*

**Chris Paul**  
*Founder, Whatcom County Youth Fair*

**Phyllis Self**  
*Campaigner for support of the arts*

**Peggy Zoro**  
*Leader in health and education*

## 2008

**Flip Breskin**  
*Musician and community organizer*

**The Late Catherine May**  
*Promoter of senior citizen services locally and nationally*

**Amory Peck**  
*Nationally recognized "extraordinary library advocate"*

**Barbara Rofkar**  
*Chair, Whatcom Human Rights Task Force*

**State Senator Harriet Spanel**  
*Environmental and legislative leader*

## *In Appreciation*

As are so many local historians, I am deeply indebted to Jeff Jewell, photo historian at the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, for his generous help with photographs, historical details, stories and genealogies. Ruth Steele, archivist at the Western Washington University's Center for Pacific Northwest Studies (CPNWS), lent invaluable aid in accessing the YWCA Collection archived there. She will also assist in posting the book and oral history interviews to the CPNWS and the Washington Women's History Consortium Web sites. At WWU's Wilson Library Special Collections, Marian Alexander and Tamara Belts made photos available and helped me research the Normal School's YWCA Club.

I am grateful to the many women of the YWCA who granted me oral history interviews, whose names appear with their memories in the text and in Information Sources. Others committed to preserving our history, such as Gordon Tweit and Brian Griffin, shared memories from their own desire to preserve local history. Without these, this book would have less insight into the human side of events.

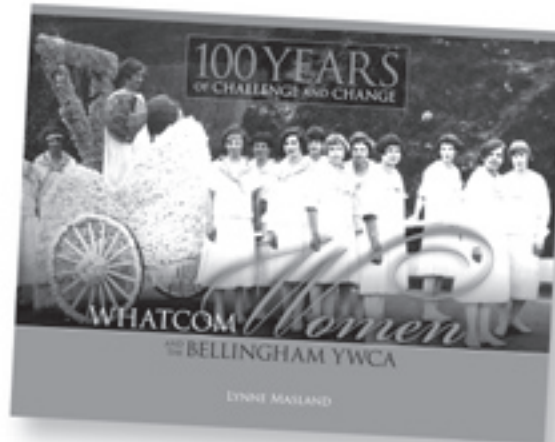
I would also like to acknowledge my debt to Randy Roebuck and the late WWU historian Keith Murray for their written accounts of the early days of the YWCA, especially the Larrabees' decision to build the YWCA home and Murray's thorough research on those formative years. To Tom Petruzzi, I am grateful for his permission to use information from his research paper on Frances Payne Larrabee.

All in our community owe a debt to Lottie Roeder Roth for her two-volume history of Whatcom County published in 1926.

For reading early drafts and making many helpful suggestions, I thank my journalist daughter, Molly Masland, and our family's Canadian friend, Kim Davies. My husband, Steve Mayo, contributed encouragement and stories about Bellingham in the 1960s.

To my friend and colleague, Jo Collinge, goes my unstinting appreciation and affection for getting me into this project in the first place and for being at my side with suggestions, editing, and support every minute of the way.

To Aaron Logue of Credo Graphics, my thanks for his helpfulness and superb design. This book is truly a collaborative effort.



My deepest gratitude goes to those unsung women who, for a century or more, kept records, photographs and newspaper clippings and made scrapbooks to preserve the history of their times, especially YWCA memories. In addition to the archives, several women, such as Alice Richards, made their personal scrapbooks available. Without them, this tribute to the women of Whatcom County and the YWCA would not have been possible.

With this last acknowledgement comes an appeal. These days of computerized record keeping and digital photos – more transitory than we would like to think – bring a dearth of material for future historians. It is the crumpled black-and-white photo or yellowed clipping found in scrapbooks that suddenly brings history alive. My plea is, please, keep printed organizational records, photographs and memorabilia. Take them to archives such as those at the CPNWS or the Whatcom Museum, so the future may be as well documented as the past.

## ENDNOTES

### Women's Lives in Early Whatcom County

<sup>1</sup> Charlotte (Lottie) T. Roeder Roth (1864-1933) was the daughter of Henry and Elizabeth Roeder. In 1885, she married Charles Independence Roth, a local attorney. In 1925 she became supervising editor of a proposed history of Whatcom County. The advisory board included such prominent local citizens as Hugh Eldridge, J. J. Donovan, Lin H. Hadley, F. F. Handschy, and Edith M. Thornton. The book, *History of Whatcom County*, was published in 1926. She was a member of the Episcopalian Church, and a member of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, for which she served as historian.

<sup>2</sup> Roth, Charlotte (Lottie) T. Roeder. *History of Whatcom County*, 1926, 212.

<sup>3</sup> Known as the "Mother of Lynden," Phoebe Goodell Judson (1831-1926) was the first non-Native woman to settle in the Lynden area and is credited with naming the city. She and her husband, Holden, moved to Whatcom County in 1871 after leaving Ohio by covered wagon for the Oregon Territory in 1853. They farmed and kept a store in Lewis County before settling in Lynden in 1871.

Judson supported women's suffrage, which made her a pioneer in a different aspect. According to Susan Armitage in her "Forward" to *A Pioneer Searches for an Ideal Home*, *Phoebe Goodnell Judson*, "Phoebe Judson also believed in women's rights. She praised the Oregon Donation land act of 1851, which allowed married women to claim 160 acres in addition to the husband's 160 as a "just and righteous law." In 1883-87, Washington Territory extended the suffrage to its female citizens. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1984, originally published in 1925, 3, 277.

Judson and Elizabeth Austin Roeder were long-time friends, both having come west from Vermillion, Ohio, where Elizabeth had also met Henry Roeder.

<sup>4</sup> Californian Pierre Cornwall originally invested in coal mining at the Sehome coal mine. After the mines became unsafe to work, he gathered a group of investors together and formed the Bellingham Bay Improvement Co., incorporating the mine and other ventures into the company.

<sup>5</sup> The second woman elected in 1912 was Nina Jolidon Croake of Tacoma, a Progressive Party member and suffrage activist, who gave her occupation as Doctor of Osteopathy. Axtell, a Republican, listed hers as housewife. Both served just one term.

<sup>6</sup> Roth, 547

<sup>7</sup> <http://library.thinkquest.org/18802/normteac.htm>

### "Scrubbing Beyond Our Backdoors"

<sup>1</sup> Cote, Jennifer. "Class and Ideology of Womanhood: The Early Years of the Boston YWCA," *History Journal of Massachusetts*, Winter 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Blair, Karen. Presentation by Karen Blair on the history of women's clubs, WA State Historical Museum, March 29, 2007. <http://washingtonwomenshistory.org/themes/clubs/historyofClubsBlairAudio.aspx>, part 2.

<sup>3</sup> Washington Women's History Consortium website, <http://washingtonwomenshistory.org/>

### The Long Road to Women's Voting Rights

<sup>1</sup> This article has been adapted from the full text of Stevenson's brief history of Washington women's right to vote on the Washington Women's History Consortium Web site.

<sup>2</sup> *A Pioneer Searches for an Ideal Home*, 277.

### Whatcom County Clubwomen

<sup>1</sup> Roth, 679

<sup>2</sup> Jane Cunningham Croly, a newspaper columnist who wrote under the name Jennie June, is credited with starting the first woman's club in 1868 after she was denied admittance to an all-male New York Press Club banquet honoring Charles Dickens. In 1890, the General Federation of Women's Clubs was founded with 61 organizations; the Washington Federation was launched in Tacoma in 1896.

<sup>3</sup> Petrucci, Tom, Larrabee. "Frances Payne (1867-1941): Community Builder and Consummate Clubwoman," 2008. Center for Pacific Northwest Studies at Western Washington University.

[www.historylink.org/essays/printer\\_friendly/index.cfm?file\\_id=8603-37k-](http://www.historylink.org/essays/printer_friendly/index.cfm?file_id=8603-37k-)

<sup>4</sup> Roth, 680

<sup>5</sup> Roth, 510

<sup>6</sup> Roth, 510

<sup>7</sup> Roth, 510

<sup>8</sup> Roth, 686

### YWCA: From Britain to Bellingham

<sup>1</sup> Anna Rice. *A History of the World's Young Women's Christian Association*, New York: Woman's Press 1947.

### New Whatcom Normal School Leads the Way

<sup>1</sup> In the United States, normal schools were founded to train high school graduates to be teachers. Their purpose was to establish teaching standards or *norms*. Modeled after 18<sup>th</sup> century schools in Prussia, France and Holland, the normal school movement to train teachers began in New England in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and spread across the country. New Whatcom Normal School opened in 1899; over the last century it became successively Bellingham State Normal School, Western Washington State College of Education (1937), Western Washington State College (1961) and Western Washington University (1977).

<sup>2</sup> In her personal recollections, Mabel Zoe Wilson, Normal School librarian from 1902 to 1945, wrote about journeying to Seattle in the early years: "Friday night boat trips were also a treat. Comfortable, strong little steamers had a perfect schedule for teachers. They left Bellingham about 8 p.m., arrived at Seattle at 6 a.m. and returned by day and night schedules. Clean comfortable beds."

## ENDNOTES

**Bellingham YWCA is Founded in 1907**

<sup>1</sup> Miss Gage was probably based in Seattle where the city's YWCA was founded in 1894. Whether Miss Wilson was a state or national officer is not clear.

<sup>2</sup> Information for much of this section came from Keith A. Murray's "The Origins of the Bellingham Y.W.C.A." in *Essays in Honor of James W. Scott*, edited by Howard J. Critchfield and from Randy Roebuck's *Bellingham YWCA: Our Heritage Vignettes 1907-1979*.

**The Carnegie Library and Tresize House**

<sup>1</sup> Founded in England in 1844 and in Boston in 1851, the YMCA came to Whatcom County in 1890.

**Travelers Aid**

<sup>1</sup> Murray, Keith A., 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

**The Larrabees Build the YWCA Home**

<sup>1</sup> Roebuck, Randy. *Bellingham YWCA: Our Heritage Vignettes 1907-1979*.

<sup>2</sup> As a measure of what it would cost to replicate the building today, renovation of just the three residential floors in 2001-02 was \$1.6 million.

<sup>3</sup> "Many Assist in Dedication of YWCA," *Bellingham Herald*, March 22, 1915.

**Frances Payne Larrabee**

<sup>1</sup> Patruzzi, Tom. "The Legacy of Frances Payne Larrabee: Community Builder, Consumate Clubwoman – and Much More," unpublished paper, 2006, available through the WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies. I am indebted to Mr. Patruzzi for generously sharing his paper and information on Frances Payne Larrabee with me.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

**The 'Teens and Twenties**

<sup>1</sup> The "Mosquito Fleet" was the name given to numerous small steam vessels and stern wheelers which plied the waters of Puget Sound during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, carrying passengers, mail and freight between the various settlements on the mainland, the San Juan and other islands, the Olympia Peninsula, and Victoria, British Columbia.

Many of the vessels were consolidated into the Puget Sound Navigation Company, founded by Joshua Green in 1913. In 1927, Green sold his interest in the company to the Peabody family, which renamed the system the Black Ball Line. In 1951, Washington Department of Transportation acquired the Black Ball Line for \$4.9 million and established the Washington State Ferries as a division of the state highway system. The last surviving ferry run by the Black Ball Transport Company is the *M.S. Coho*, traveling between Port Angeles and Victoria, B.C

<sup>2</sup> *Whatcom Reveille*, February 3, 1926.

<sup>3</sup> From a metal plaque belonging to the late Dorothy Giesecke, a Bellingham YWCA board member and volunteer executive director.

<sup>4</sup> During the first week of May, Bellingham held the Tulip Festival with its big parade, coronation of the Tulip Festival Queen, the school district's "Spring Festival of Athletic Activities", a carnival and tulip field tours. The Spring Festival was more akin to traditional May pole pageants that had been held on the great lawn in front of Old Main since the early days of the Normal School. The school events moved to the new Battersby Field in 1921. About 3,500 school children performed callisthenic drills, folk and May-pole dances, marches, and group gymnastics. The three-hour program featured more than 20 numbers and attracted around 9,000 spectators.

The Tulip Festival's big parade productions – children's parade, Tulip Parade, a night parade with lit floats - were abandoned during the Depression, although the school program was continued as the Spring Festival. The school marches and group maneuvers came to an end after the Nazis' Nuremburg rallies discouraged this type of activity. After WWII, the Blossom Time Festival revived many of the old features of the Tulip Festival.

The present Ski to Sea event is a blend of the Mt. Baker Marathons of 1911, 1912, and 1913 and the Tulip Festival, though its current 'fitness' emphasis is rooted in the 1970s. The timing of the Ski to Sea race coincides with the established three-day Memorial Day weekend. Information courtesy of Jeff Jewell photo historian, Whatcom Museum of History and Art.

**The Great Depression**

<sup>1</sup> Masland Bettis, Lynne. *Folklore of the Northwest Corner: The Human Touch*, Western Washington University, 1979, 60.

<sup>2</sup> Bultmann, Phyllis. *The Great Depression and Its Fifty-Year Shadow*, Occasional Paper #18, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, 1982, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Conversation with Gordon Tweit, Whatcom Museum of History and Art, May 31, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Bultmann, 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

**World War II: The Homefront**

<sup>1</sup> World War II: Women At Work. <http://womenshistory.about.com>.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, Jone Johnson. WASP – Women Pilots in World War II. <http://womenshistory.about.com>

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, Jone Johnson. World War II: The Home Front – Women at Home. <http://womenshistory.about.com>

<sup>4</sup> Selected Writings of Eleanor Roosevelt: Woman's Place After the War. <http://womenshistory.about.com>, originally published in *Click 7*, August 1944, 17, 19.

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### After Depression and War, A New Era

<sup>1</sup> In 1946, Darryl F. Zanuck of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox predicted the demise of the upstart medium: "Television won't be able to hold on to any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night."

### A Focus on Growing Families

<sup>1</sup> Dale, Dotty, email, November 14, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> O'Brien, Pat, email, November 29, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Charles X Larrabee 2<sup>nd</sup> to Jo Collinge, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> O'Brien, Pat, email, November 29, 2006.

### Growth and Celebration

<sup>1</sup> Dale, Dotty, email, November 14, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> <http://womhist.aslexanderstreet.com/portywca/war>

<sup>3</sup> "Death Summons YWCA Director," *Bellingham Herald*, March 17, 1957.

### Tumultuous Social Change – the 1960s

<sup>1</sup> Deployment of American combat forces, begun in 1965, reached nearly 500,000 by 1967. Although the last U.S. combat troops departed in 1973, the Vietnam War ended in April 1975 with the fall of Saigon and the ignominious helicopter evacuation of remaining Americans and some South Vietnamese from the embassy roof.

### The YWCA Champions Social Justice

<sup>1</sup> The YMCA/YWCA conference center on the Hood Canal.

<sup>2</sup> Written memory from YWCA presentation at the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, November 18, 2007.

### "A Welcoming Place"

<sup>1</sup> Written memory from YWCA presentation at the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, November 18, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> *1959-60 YWCA Annual Report*, YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific NW Studies Archives

<sup>3</sup> *1960 YWCA Annual Report*.

<sup>4</sup> "Bellingham YW to Mark 60<sup>th</sup> Year," *Bellingham Herald*, February 12, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> O'Brien, Pat, email, November 29, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> *1966-67 Annual Report*.

<sup>7</sup> Wikipedia, the War on Poverty.

### "To Be Themselves and For Others"

<sup>1</sup> Eco-Action Group oral history interview, January 25, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> National YWCA Triennial Convention report, YWCA archives, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.

<sup>3</sup> Fox, Margalit. "Betty Friedan, Who Ignited Cause in 'Feminine Mystique' Dies at 85," *New York Times*, February 5, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Stilwell Page, oral history interview, June 3, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> O'Brien, Pat, conversation, August 8, 2008

<sup>6</sup> Stilwell Page, Roseanna, oral history interview, June 3, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> YWCA Collection, WWU Center for Pacific Northwest Studies

### New Social Programs for the Community

<sup>1</sup> Stilwell Page, Roseanna, oral history interview, June 3, 2008

<sup>2</sup> YWCA presentation, Whatcom Museum of History and Art, November 18, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Anne W. Brown to Mary Robinson, March 28, 1973, provided by Anne Brown.

<sup>4</sup> Chevalier, Geneil Wasel, oral history interview, May 14, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Spanel, Harriet, oral history interview, July 17, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Stilwell Page, June 3, 2008.

### An Enduring Environmental Legacy

<sup>1</sup> January 25, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Griffin, Brian L. *Boulevard Park & Taylor Avenue Dock on the Old Bellingham Waterfront*, Knox Cellars Publishing Company, 2007,. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Congress passes Senator Warren Magnuson's amendment banning supertankers in Puget Sound on October 5, 1977, Historylink.org, essay #5620

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

### "We Empowered Ourselves"

<sup>1</sup> Women's History in America, Women's International Center, [www.wic.org/misc/history/htm](http://www.wic.org/misc/history/htm).

<sup>2</sup> Spanel, Harriet, oral history interview, July 17, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Culjat, Dorothy, oral history interview, July 20, 2008.



## ENDNOTES

**“The House on the Hill Changes Its Image”**

- <sup>1</sup> “Stagflation in the 1970s,” and “The Economy in the 1980s,” About.com:Economics.
- <sup>2</sup> Full text of the ad: “It’s morning again in America. Today more men and women will go to work than ever before in our country’s history. With interest rates at about half the record highs of 1980, nearly 2,000 families today will buy new homes, more than at any time in the past four years. This afternoon 6,500 young men and women will be married, and with inflation at less than half of what it was just four years ago, they can look forward with confidence to the future. It’s morning again in America, and under the leadership of President Reagan, our country is prouder and stronger and better. Why would we ever want to return to where we were less than four short years ago?” “Morning in America” ad, *You Tube*.
- <sup>3</sup> Reamer, Grace. “YWCA – The House on the Hill Changes Its Image,” *Bellingham Herald*, November 21, 1981.

**The Bellingham YWCA at 75**

- <sup>1</sup> Murray, Shirley. “A Fashion Show of the Decades”, 1982 Annual Membership Meeting, March 1, 1982. YWCA Collection, *loc. cit.*

**A Long Period of Transition Begins**

- <sup>1</sup> Thomas, Eric. “Money squeeze prompts YWCA aid appeal,” *Bellingham Herald*, July 21, 1982.
- <sup>2</sup> “Whatcom United Way divides \$688,000,” *Bellingham Herald*, July 23, 1982.
- <sup>3</sup> July 20, 2008.
- <sup>4</sup> These three lots remained with the YWCA until they were sold to the Opportunity Council for \$75,000 in 1997 to provide building space for Dorothy Place.
- <sup>5</sup> 1989 Annual Report, YWCA Collection, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>6</sup> Oral history interview, August 11, 2008

**Red Ink Leads to New Focus**

- <sup>1</sup> Culjat, Dorothy, oral history interview, July 20, 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> Under the leadership of former YWCA board member Robin Bailey.
- <sup>3</sup> Prentice, Rachel. “Director strives to keep YWCA afloat,” *Bellingham Herald*, November, 1996.
- <sup>4</sup> September 18, 1997 board minutes, YWCA Collection, *loc. cit.*

**Closing the Pool**

- <sup>1</sup> Hite, Pat, oral history interview, July 20, 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> Spanel, Harriet, oral history interview, July 17, 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> Foster, Julie, oral history interview, June 26, 2008.

**Dorothy Place**

- <sup>1</sup> Anderson, Kathie. “YWCA still encourages ‘responsible risk-taking,’” *Bellingham Herald*, March 29, 1984.
- <sup>2</sup> Dorothy Place is the result of collaboration between the City of Bellingham, YWCA, Womencare, and the Opportunity Council with support from many others. Among the women involved were: Sheila Hardy, City planner; Marty Synder, Opportunity Council; Susan Mancuso, YWCA board member; Ann Suloway, YWCA housing director; Jane Freudenberger, YWCA board member; and Rev. Cindy Bauleke, Opportunity Council board president.

**Help for New Lives**

- <sup>1</sup> Eberhart, Shannon. YWCA of Bellingham: Assessment and Recommendations for Phased Growth and Development, October 1, 1997. YWCA Collection, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>2</sup> Foster, Julie, oral history interview, June 26, 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> Suloway, Ann, oral history interview, September 2, 2008

**A Unique Boutique**

- <sup>1</sup> Fraley, Zoe. “YWCA Boutique offers work outfits for low-income women,” *Bellingham Herald*, July 25, 2007.

**Entering a Second Century**

- <sup>1</sup> All proceeds from the launch party of Brian Griffin’s book, *Boulevard Park and Taylor Avenue Dock*, held November 1, 2007 at the Depot Market were donated to the YWCA.

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Women's History in America, Women's International Center

# 100 YEARS

OF CHALLENGE AND CHANGE

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Lynne Masland

## LYNNE MASLAND

YWCA volunteer Centennial history chair Lynne Masland was director of media and public relations at Western Washington University and an adjunct professor at Western's Fairhaven College before retiring in 2006. She chaired Western's year-long Centennial celebration in 1999-2000 and was co-curator of the 2006-2007 Whatcom Museum exhibit, *A Century of Challenge and Change*, which was the impetus for this book.



She has edited four books, including *Western Washington University: 100 Years* and *Folklore of the Northwest Corner: The Human Touch*, and has authored scholarly papers and reviews as well as numerous newspaper and magazine articles.

She did undergraduate work at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, and at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of California at Riverside and a doctorate in comparative literature from the University of British Columbia. Her research focused on the portrayal of older women in French and American literature in the past and present, a significant background for this exploration of Whatcom women's lives as seen through the prism of the YWCA.

Active in community affairs, she is a member of Bellingham Sunrise Rotary and serves on the Whatcom Community College Foundation board of directors. She is married to maritime artist Steve Mayo and has two daughters, a stepdaughter and three grandsons.



Photo by Joy Keenan, 2008

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