



# Benn's Bulletin

A Publication of *The Friends of the Aberdeen Museum*

February 2010

## Frozen *in* Time

### Grave of Aberdeen "Stamper" Found



*Photo from Eric A. Hegg Collection*

*Stampede ascends Chilkoot Pass 1898.*

*The Canadian Government required Stampede to have a years worth of supplies, about one ton in weight (mostly food).*

### Coming Events

Aberdeen Museum Board  
Monthly Meeting  
First Tuesday of each month  
Aberdeen Museum  
7:00 p.m.

Friends of the Aberdeen Museum  
Monthly Meeting  
Third Tuesday of each month  
Aberdeen Museum  
7:00 p.m.

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Coming!!  
Sunday, March 21, 2010  
An Afternoon with the

*The Women of  
Grays Harbor*



### Aberdeen Museum searching for relatives

In September of 2007, Canadian Park Ranger Michael Gates called me from his station in the Yukon. We spoke in the phone for over an hour as he related stories of grave sites he and co-workers had discovered while making an archaeological survey along the route of the future road to Skagway.

Michael told me of a metal plate they had found attached to a large chunk of granite at the south end of the Tagist Lake arm. The plate was inscribed with the name of J. F. Whitcomb. Later he found the Mounted Police report stating the cause of death. It was one of those tragic accidents that often occur. He was on the trail to the Klondike when he stumbled and his rifle discharged killing him. A plaque mounted on a boulder remains in its isolated location to remind the occasional wilderness hikers of Whitcomb's demise.

During the Gold Rush of 1897-98, tragic stories like Whitcomb's would be repeated time and again as prospectors pushed north along the Chilkoot Trail.

**Frozen:** *Continued on Page 2*



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**Frozen** *Continued from page 1*

Resting on a sandy hillside behind the City of Bennett is a graveyard filled with the bodies of “Stampederers” who died during their quest for gold. On a rocky terrace overlooking the former site of Lindeman City is a second grave yard, home to a dozen more permanent residents with a magnificent view of Lindeman Lake. There are also numerous individual graves scattered along the Chilkoot Trail.

Stampederers from all over Canada, the United States, and as far away as South Africa, England and Australia; all genders and ages shared ordeals on the trail.

There were many innocent victims of the gold rush. Baby Henry Bluth died at Bennett, May 14, 1898; the seven-month-old infant of the Card family died May of 1897, and the infant daughter of the McKay’s laid to rest next to her.



*William S. Kent's grave when first discovered*

Gates related that; thanks to Ed and Star Jones (who had just completed a voluminous study of Yukon deaths) and the extensive knowledge of veteran Parks Canada patrol person Christine Hedgecock, he and his team were able to identify one of the gravesites at Lindeman as that of Joseph Fortin, a relative of famed Yukon pioneer Emilie Tremblay. Fortin had actually died two years before the gold rush.

As part of his work, Gates has been able to match names to the growing list of 70 tragic souls who died on the Chilkoot from the summit to Lake Lindeman, and Bennett City.

Most tragic however, are those whose identities have been lost to time. Persons often found without identification, or simply not reported fully, these individuals lie along the trail in plain unmarked graves.

It was one of these ancient graves that prompted Ranger Gates to call the Aberdeen Museum. In the cemetery near Lindeman, Gates’ team discovered a marker deteriorated by the ravages of time. The wafer-thin cedar panel on which this persons name had been inscribed had literally worn away from exposure to the elements. The badly weathered inscription was barely legible. What could be

discerned was the letter ‘N.’ which might have been the ending of a last name, On the lower portion, protected by debris piled up around it was a Masonic symbol and the words “Aberdeen, Washington,” along with the year, 1898.

By candlelight in late August of 2007, at the Lindeman Lake warden station, Ranger Gates, Ranger Hedgecock, and Park Warden Rene Rivard sat and scrutinized the shadows cast by the slightly raised letters on the weathered fragments of the panel, hoping to gain the identity of this individual. It was to no avail.

Ah, the reason for the call, not that I didn’t enjoy Ranger Gates’ stories, as a matter of fact it has renewed my interest in the Klondike and the gold rush. Gates wondered if we might be aware of any men belonging to the Aberdeen Masonic

**Frozen** *Continued on Page 5*



*What was left of head board  
with the letter 'N' and Masonic emblem.*

Lodge that had gone to the Klondike during the gold rush.

I told him it might take a few days; we would do what we could. We said our farewells and hung up.

I made a search list from my notes. The first item on the list—check with the Aberdeen Masonic Lodge. I discovered that the Aberdeen Lodge had closed and all their records were stored in the Hoquiam Lodge.

The next day I contacted Al Bowman of the Hoquiam lodge and made an appointment for that afternoon. After a great tour of the historic Hoquiam Lodge, Al and I got down to business. I gave him all the information that I had, and he said with a big grin, “I will give it good try.” I returned to the museum thinking that it would be a few days before I heard from Al. However, 30 minutes after I returned, Al called, and said that he had found three names, and the dates they left for Canada. I wrote them down, but sadly none of the names ended with the letter

‘N.’ Al told me he would keep looking. I hung the names on my computer.

Saturday morning I found myself again staring at the names Al had given me. Then it dawned on me, maybe the ‘N’ was not the last letter in his name. My assumption was correct. The person’s name was William S. Kent.

At that moment Roy Vataja a local historian and museum volunteer came in to work. I filled him in on the story and Roy scurried to the Aberdeen Library and searched through micro-films of early Aberdeen Heralds. After only twenty-minutes—Blam! There it was. A short article about William S. Kent. The only last name containing the letter ‘N.’ More information came in from Al, and everything matched.

I phoned Michael Gates, then emailed him the information. Needless to say, he was excited.

William S. Kent had died on the trail from Typhoid fever on May 16, 1898.

Kent had been a steam engineer, and worked a number of years at mills in Aberdeen before being caught up in the frenzy of the gold rush. Two months earlier, he and a friend left Aberdeen in search of fortune, but now Kent lies in his final resting place having left a grieving widow here in Aberdeen to mourn his loss.

Ranger Gates called me a few months later, informing me that with the information researched by the Aberdeen Museum and the financial support of Masonic Lodge brothers of Whitehorse; his team was able to place a new marker on Mr. Kent’s grave site.

Gates wrote; “Overlooking the peaceful waters of Lindeman Lake, I stood with Patrol-person Simon Johnson beside Kent’s grave. We had completed our work replacing the fence, and marker on the Kent grave. The day was bright and warm, and the air still as we paid our respects to the fallen Stampeder.”

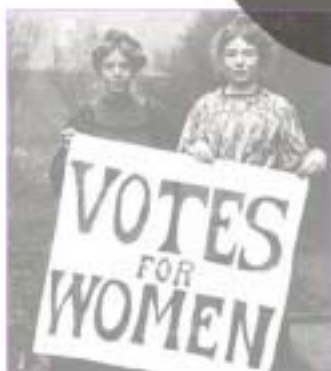
Mr. Kent’s identity will now survive the passage of time and resist the ravages of the long harsh winters.

In all the information we have found; obituaries, letters from the Masonic Lodge, and applications, not once does it mention the name of Kent’s wife, or any children. However we are still searching. It would be wonderful to be able to contact a relative, and let them know that Mr. Kent, once lost to the wilderness, had been found.



*Ranger Michael Gates and his team are extremely dedicated. I received an email with the photographs of Kent’s gravesite along with the information that the Chilkoot is a wilderness, and transporting a 215 pound granite marker to Lindeman was a challenge.*

Enjoy a Historic Afternoon  
with  
*The Women of Grays Harbor*



Second in a series of  
Living Histories

*Presented by*

The Aberdeen Museum  
of History

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2:00 p.m.

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Musical Interludes  
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Raffle

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February  
Black History Month

# Woolworth's Counter COURAGE IN GREENSBORO



*The four Greensboro freshmen. Photograph was taken the first day by Jack Moebes of the Greensboro Record. Blacks employed by Woolworth's were not even allowed to eat at this counter.*

In September, 1960 I was beginning my junior year at Weatherwax High School. Having been raised in an environment where only minors were discriminated against, I really had no opinion about the strife that was taking place in the segregated sections of our nation, or at least the South. That was one of the subjects you read about in News Week, U.S. News, or Time magazines, and discussed in World Problems class. My biggest worries, grades and working up nerve to ask someone to the Christmas Formal.

Seven months earlier (Feb. 1, 1960), and three thousand miles away four young African-American freshmen, attending North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College seated themselves at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, that had, until that moment, been used exclusively by white customers. The four—Joseph McNeil, David Richmond, Ezell Blair Jr., and Franklin McCain—each ordered a cup of coffee—however, were refused service, but they didn't leave. Instead they launched a nonviolent protest that lasted six months and helped change America.

This Greensboro protest sparked similar actions in other cities across North Carolina and other segregationist states. What these students were confronting was not the law, but rather a cultural system that defined racial relations.

Joseph McNeil, 67, now a retired Air Force major general living on Long Island, New York, said the idea of staging a sit-in to protest the ingrained injustice had been around for awhile. "I grew up in Wilmington, N.C., and even in high school, we thought about doing something like that," he said. After graduating, McNeil moved with his family to New York, than returned to the South to study engineering physics at North Carolina A&T in Greensboro.

Returning to school after Christmas vacation during his freshmen year, McNeil observed his shift in status as he traveled south by bus. "In Philadelphia, he recalls, "I could eat anywhere in the bus station. By Maryland things began to change." And in the Gray-hound depot in Richmond, Virginia, McNeil couldn't buy a hot dog at a food counter reserved for whites. "I was still the same person, but without a doubt treated differently." Once back at school, he and three friends decided to

Visit the  
**Think-O-Me**  
*Gift Shop*

### Oral History Interviews

*John Bebich  
Hans Bielski  
Dwight Caron  
Bill Jones  
Ted Rakoski  
Bronco Tesia*

**Kurt Cobain**

**Books, and Buttons**

Ted T. Reynvaan's

**The Boys  
of  
Company  
B**

Memories of the men of  
"B" Comany  
11th Infantry Battalion  
U.S. Marine Corps  
Reserve.  
Aberdeen, Washington  
Korean War Era

**Courage:** *continued from Page 4*

confront segregation. “To face this kind of experience and not challenge it meant we were part of the problem,” McNeil recalls.

The Woolworth’s in Greensboro with its marble stairs and 25,000 square feet of retail space was one of the company’s flagship stores. The lunch counter where white diners faced rose-tinted mirrors, generated significant profits. It required considerable courage and sacrifice for the four students to sit down there.

News of the sit-in spread rapidly thanks in part to a photograph taken the first day by Jack Moebes of the *Greensboro Record* and stories in the paper by Marvin Sykes and Jo Spivey.

Nonviolent protests began outside the store, while other protesters took their turn at the counter.

By February 4, African-Americans, mainly students, occupied 63 of the 66 seats at the counter (waitresses sat in the remaining three). Protesters prepared to assume their place crowded the aisles. After six months of diminished sales, and unflattering publicity; Woolworth’s desegregated the lunch counter—an astonishing victory for nonviolent protest.

More than three decades later, October, 1993 Woolworth’s closed their Greensboro store as part of a company-wide downsizing. A section of that historic counter is held by the

National Museum of American History, thanks to William Yeingst, chairman of the museum’s division home and community life.

Woolworth’s officials agreed that a portion of the counter belonged at the Smithsonian, and volunteers from the local Greensboro area carpenters’ union removed an eight-foot section with four stools, which was placed on exhibit within site of the flag that inspired the national anthem.

Later McNeil was asked if he ever returned to Woolworth’s to eat after the sit-in ended, he laughed, saying: “Well, I went back when I returned to school the following September. However, the food was bland, and the apple pie wasn’t that good. So it is fair to say I didn’t go back often.”



The  
Aberdeen  
Museum  
of  
History

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