



TACOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CITY OF DESTINY NEWSLETTER

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One Man's Historical Riddle Is Solved At Last

By Bob Tschida

Have you ever tried to track down one of those will-o-the-wisp childhood memories that you remember distinctly – but no one else seems to? Let me tell you about one of mine, and how long-sought proof finally turned up.

Along the Tacoma City Waterway towards its northern entrance, on its west side, there were two large shipping warehouses with adjoining docks.

The warehouse to the north was the Commercial Dock, and a space in between provided a separation from the other warehouse, which was larger and higher. The other warehouse was called McCormick Dock or the McCormick Steamship Co. Foss Launch & Tug Co. occupied the northern tip of Commercial Dock. This was where they based the tugs and had their operational headquarters.

Snuggled between the two warehouses was a small café. It was pretty well sheltered from prevailing winds. The little café on the docks was a godsend to all who stopped in to eat or just a cup of coffee. Kids in

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Charting Transportation in Tacoma



Marvin Boland photo, 1928
Courtesy Tacoma Public Library

Tacoma Mayor Mel Tennent posed in an airplane called *The City of Destiny* at Tacoma Municipal Airport on Feb. 8, 1928. Lettering proclaimed Tacoma “The Lumber Capital of the World.” Tennent was mayor from 1926 to 1929 and 1930 to 1933. A timeline of transportation in Tacoma appears on pages 4 and 5.

Coming soon ... a THS web site

Your board is moving forward on establishing a web site for the Tacoma Historical Society. We've registered the domain name, <http://www.tacomahistory.org>.

We expect to have news about THS meetings and events, information about Tacoma history, and links to other web sites of interest to local history buffs.

We hope to be online in November.

Waterfront Mill Marker Project Moves Ahead

First four bronze displays
commissioned; T-shirt sales will
finance additional plaques

Commemorating an era when sawmills lined the Old Town waterfront, a project is under way to mark the sites of some of the major mills.

Funding has been secured, and artist Paul Michaels has been commissioned to create four three-foot-square bronze displays that will be placed alongside the Ruston Way sidewalk. The four mill sites are:

1. The Tacoma Mill Co. (1868-1913)
2. The Henry Mill and Timber Co. (1922-1942)
3. The North End Lumber Co. (1901-1933)
4. The Defiance Lumber Co. (1901-1951).

The first two sites are near Jack Hyde Park; the North End and Defiance mills were near the Asarco smelter property. Each display will feature bronze plaques depicting an image of the mill and explanatory text.

The project is being funded by a \$5,000 grant from the City of Tacoma to the North End Neighborhood Council and by a \$1,000 grant from the Tacoma Historical Society.

To raise money toward additional displays, the society is selling T-shirts with a Paul Michaels waterfront scene and the legend, "Tacoma's First Working Waterfront – First Sawmill in Old Tacoma 1869." The T-shirts will be available at THS meetings and other events. They sell for \$10.

Michaels' work includes the statue of Ben Cheney at Cheney Stadium and the sidewalk plaques in the Proctor District's original business block.

The waterfront sawmill project was initiated by Gordon Russ and assisted by Jayne Fortt.

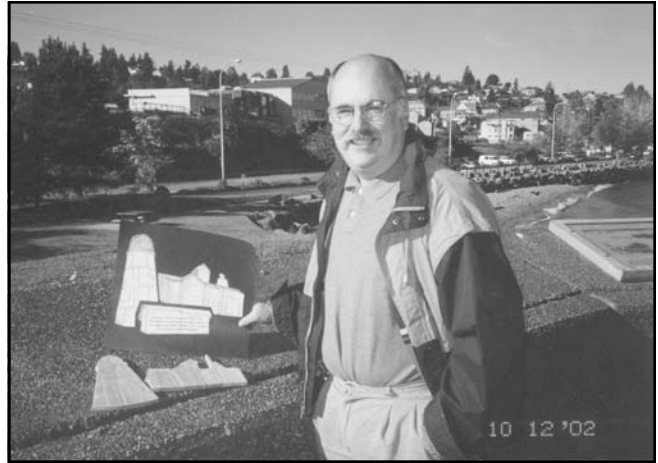


Photo by Dale Wirsing

Standing in Jack Hyde Park in Old Town, artist Paul Michaels shows wooden foundry molds and a drawing of one of the displays that will be put in place to mark the location of important lumber mills on Tacoma's original waterfront.

This and That

✍ Tacoma's Slavonian American Benevolent Society, now 101 years old, is raising funds for a commemorative statue to be placed at the entrance of Slavonian Hall, 2306 N. 30th St., in Old Town. The society was organized in 1901 by immigrants from what is now Croatia.

The sculpture will recall a turn-of-the-century Slavonian commercial fisherman returning home and being greeted by his wife. The sculptor selected for the project is Larry Anderson, creator of such Tacoma favorites as *New Beginnings* at Union Station. Additional information is available from the society.

✍ The Board of Directors of the Tacoma Historical Society meets at 7 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at the society's office, 3712 S. Cedar St. The next meeting is Dec. 3. Members are invited to attend and to bring their ideas and comments.

Yes, there really was a café on the dock

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the summertime would buy a bottle of Orange Crush if they had a nickel.

We were among the kids who stopped in quite often, especially in the winter months. Yes, we even went fishing off those docks on some Saturdays. If we had a dime or two we would buy a bowl of hot soup on a cold day. There was no limit on taking all the oyster crackers we could eat.

The little café on the docks had various names. Some called it “Grant’s Café” or “General Grant’s Café.” Officially, it was “Commercial Dock Lunch.” Kids got a kick out of calling Mr. Hessey “General Grant,” and he always enjoyed that. Although he was known as Grant G. Hessey, his real name was Gerald Grant Hessey. His mother chose the name since her husband was a Civil War veteran and a good friend of Gen. Grant.

Years later when I would bring up the subject of the little café on the docks, not a single person could recall the café between Commercial Dock and McCormick Dock. They would say, “Well, I remember the café at the Middle Waterway boathouse where boats were rented out.” But they would insist that no little café ever existed where I described it.

So as time went by I dropped the subject, figuring no one would believe me anyway. After all, what concrete proof did I have? There were no existing photos that I knew of. So I dropped the subject.

But about a year ago, exact verification came about that there indeed had been a little café on the docks. My wife Betty and I were chatting with Vi Bruno, a member of the Tacoma Historical Society, about the Tacoma waterfront during the 1930s. I casually mentioned the little café on the docks called “General



PHOTO BY DALE WIRSING

Author Bob Tschida shares a laugh with the person who solved his longtime puzzle, Vi Bruno.

Grant’s Café” and how no one would accept my boyhood recollection.

That was my grandfather’s café!” Vi said.

Vi said family lore dated the café to 1917. It continued in business until sometime during World War II, when it was removed for security reasons. (“Loose lips sink ships.”)

As a little girl, Vi liked to visit her grandfather’s café because sailors would buy her ice cream. And she recalled that she liked to play on a ramp that led to the McCormick Dock.

Born in 1871, Grant G. Hessey died in 1945.

If you would like to follow up on the story of the little café, go the Tacoma Public Library’s Northwest Room and open up one of the large bound volumes of Sanford’s fire insurance maps, which show all the homes and buildings in Tacoma of those years. When you come across Commencement Bay and the City Waterway and see two large warehouses and a tiny building marked café, you now have added proof that there was indeed a “little café on the docks.”

And if you by chance have photos or other items relating to the café, Vi would be delighted to hear from you at 759-0239.

Born in Tacoma on June 12, 1924, Bob Tschida is known among local history buffs as “Mr. Tacoma.” He is an active volunteer with the Working Waterfront Museum and the veterans hospital at American Lake. He was active in the Holy Rosary alumni group and is a member of the Tacoma Historical Writers Group. He is a charter member of the Tacoma Historical Society, which presented him its Murray Morgan Award.

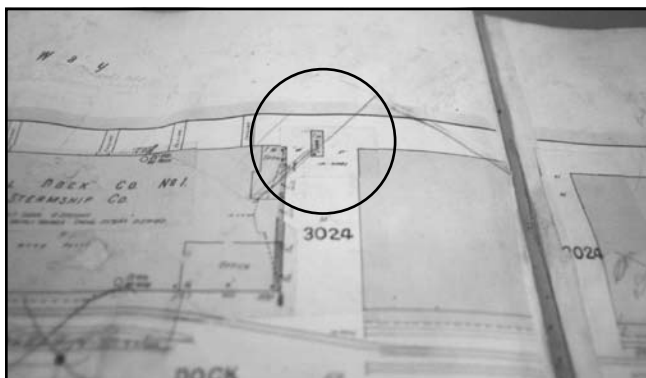


PHOTO BY BOB TSCHIDA

A circle indicates the tiny rectangle on the Sanborn’s Fire Insurance map that marked the location of the Commercial Dock Lunch.

A time line of transportation in Tacoma

By Ron Magden and Gary Fuller Reese

1850 The side-wheeler *Fairy* replaces the “canoe express” in carrying the U.S. Mail to Tacoma settlers.

1851 Birth of the Mosquito Fleet Route by the Hudson Bay Company’s steamship *Beaver*, including Olympia, Fort Nisqually, Steilacoom, Tacoma and Seattle.

1853 First load of lumber shipped from Nicholas Delin’s Tacoma sawmill to San Francisco on the *George Emory*.

1859 Tacoma becomes a port of call for the *Eliza Anderson*, which controls the Olympia-Victoria freight and passenger business.

1869 First commercial wharf, the Starr Street Dock, constructed in Old Town... *Samoset* carries the first cargo of lumber from Starr Street Dock to San Francisco.

1873 Northern Pacific Railroad reaches Tacoma, its western transcontinental terminus.

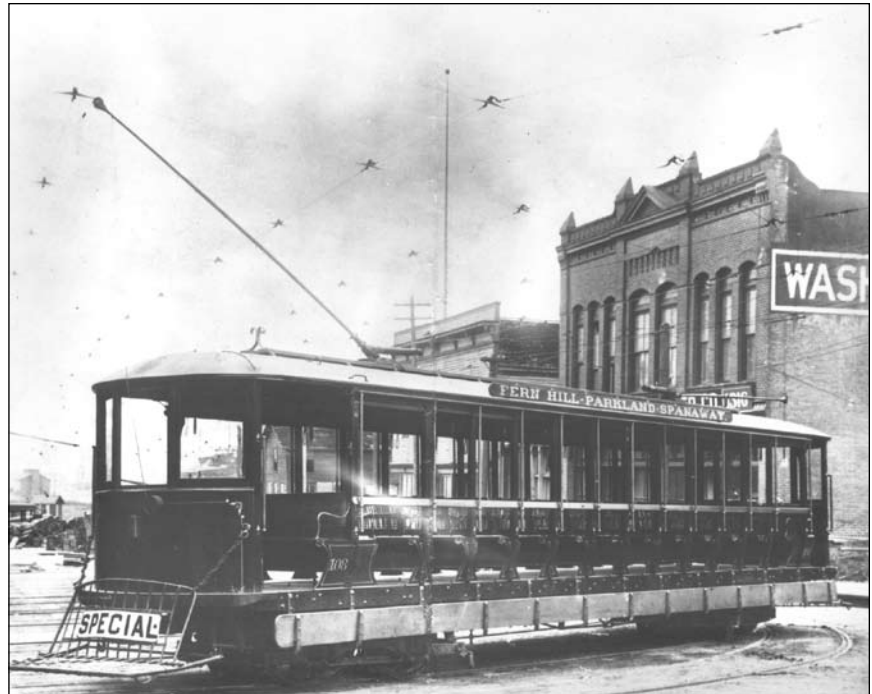
1880 Pacific Coast Steamship Company begins freight and passenger service between Tacoma and San Francisco. Population of Tacoma reaches 1,098.

1883 Northern Pacific constructs coal bunkers on Commencement Bay.

1887 First train arrives over Cascade switchback. Wheat and coal shipments East as well as tea and silk imports from East Asia create great prosperity in Tacoma.

1888 Horse-drawn streetcars begin service on Tacoma streets.

1889 Tacoma Smelter begins production at Point



Marvin Boland photo, Courtesy Tacoma Public Library

The Fern Hill-Parkland-Spanaway streetcar waited for its next run on A Street in downtown Tacoma circa 1910.

Defiance, employing 1,500 men. Foss Launch & Tug Co. founded by Andrew and Thea Foss.

1890 Tacoma population 36,006.

1891 Cable cars begin operating on 11th Street hill.

1892 Arrival of the *Phra Nang*, first steamer from East Asia.

1893 Fourteen of 21 Tacoma banks fail in Tacoma’s first Great Depression.

1894 First Eleventh Street bridge completed.

1897 F. P. Riley returns to Tacoma with \$85,000 in gold he mined in Alaska. Hundreds quit their jobs and head for Alaska. Beginning of Tacoma-Alaska trade and end of first Great Depression.

1900 First electric automobile in Tacoma owned by S. A. Perkins.

1900 Population of Tacoma reaches 37,714.

1902 Electric streetcars replaced horse-drawn cars in downtown Tacoma. The Puget Sound Electric Railway, the Interurban, connected Tacoma with Seattle and towns in between. The Interurban gradually replaces the Tacoma-Seattle passenger ships.

1907 Northern Pacific and Union Pacific railroads announce joint use of tracks into Tacoma.

1909 Great Northern Railroad begins service to Tacoma.

1910 Population of Tacoma 83,743.

1911 The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad begins service to Tacoma... The Union Passenger Station is completed.

1912 New Eleventh Street Bridge connects Tideflats with A Street.

1913 Railroads begin construction of freight yards on the Tideflats.

1916 Paved roads and heavy-duty trucks replace the Mosquito Fleet in carrying local freight.

1917 Huge shipments of spruce lumber for airplane construction and construction of wooden ships in Tideflats shipyards.

1918 Tacoma/Pierce County voters create the public Port of Tacoma on Tideflats.

1919 General Strike shuts down Tacoma's transportation industry for three days.

1920 Tacoma's population jumps to 96,965.

1922 Rudy A. Mueller and Leo H. Harkins create the Tacoma Airport.

1926 Air mail and passenger service begun at Tacoma Municipal Airport by Pacific Air Transport.



Marvin Boland photo, *Courtesy Tacoma Public Library*

As the country moved full tilt into the automotive age, around the time of World War I, this is what Tacoma Transit Co. buses looked like.

1927 Highway 99 established.

1928 Interurban ceases service between Tacoma and Seattle.

1937 Mueller-Harkins Tacoma Airport renamed Tacoma Municipal Airport.

1938 Streetcars and cable cars replaced by buses; streetcar tracks taken up.

1940 Tacoma Narrows Bridge connects the Peninsula with the mainland, opening July 1. One hundred and thirty days later "Galloping Gertie" collapses in a November windstorm.

1950 Second Narrows Bridge opens.

1965 Interstate 5 highway segment through Tacoma is finished, replacing Highway 99.

1970 Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads merge to form Burlington Northern.

1980 Milwaukee Road ceases operations.

1990 Interstate 705 opens, linking downtown Tacoma to Interstate 5.

SURFING FOR HISTORY

The Internet is often a great way to find about local history and events commemorating it. Here we review a few sites of interest to Tacoma history buffs.

<http://www.fortnisqually.org>

This is a well-thought-out web site. The home page has buttons to connect with almost anything you'd want to know about Fort Nisqually, a historic site that recalls the Hudson's Bay Co. era on Puget Sound.

<http://www.rain.org/~karpeles/taq.html>

The Karpeles Manuscript Library web site usually has information on its current exhibit. Though Karpeles has been informed of its error, it persists in giving directions to 6th Street when it means 6th Avenue. A link that promises "more on Tacoma Washington" leads only to an ad for an internet service provider.

<http://www.jobcarmuseum.org/>

Oh, well, it's a start. Currently, the Job Carr Cabin Museum web site has only one page, which does give the address and hours. One would hope for historical photos and a biography of Job Carr.

History Buffs' Calendar

- You have heard of Pickett's Charge. But did you know that Pickett served out here in Washington Territory?
"An Afternoon with General George Pickett — His Life and Times — Service at Fort Steilacoom, in the Pig War, and the Civil War." Sponsored by the DuPont Historical Society. Sunday, Nov. 3, at 2 p.m. at DuPont Presbyterian Church.
- World War II Day — "CodeTalkers" Pierce College, Puyallup Campus, Library/Science Building — Nov. 20, 7 p.m., Cost: \$10 / Students \$5. (253) 964-6734
- Book Party: An event honoring author Stan Flewelling and his new book, *Shirakawa: A History of the White River Valley Japanese*, has been scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 19, at the Main Branch of Tacoma Public Library. Copies will be available for purchase, and Flewelling will be on hand to sign copies. The Tacoma Historical Society has been asked to join with the Japanese American Citizens League in co-sponsoring the book party.
Shirakawa is published by the Univ. of Washington Press.

Articles wanted: *The City of Destiny Newsletter* is looking for original writing relating to Tacoma history. Contact Dr. Dale Wirsing, editor, at (253) 564-7843 or bokorm@foxinternet.net.

Remembering

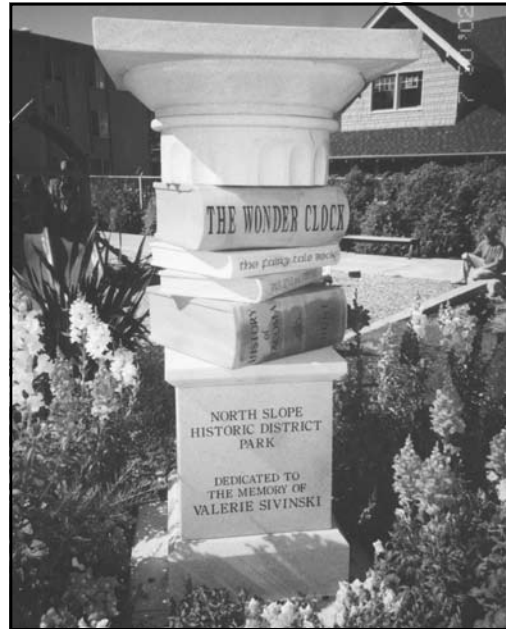


Photo by Dale Wirsing

One of Tacoma's most dedicated preservationists is memorialized in this statue in the new North Slope Historic District Park, North 8th and K. It is dedicated to the memory of Valerie Sivinski, killed in a downtown traffic accident Oct. 17, 2000.

Help Wanted:

- It's not too early to start thinking about the 2003 Tour of Homes, May 3-4. We can use your help in identifying homes and planning and organizing the tour. Contact **Thomas Hudson**, 973-3700 or Thomas@1mrhistory.com
- The Tacoma Speedway put Tacoma on the national map in auto racing in the early days of the 20th century. The wooden racetrack operated from 1912 to 1922. **Dr. Wayne Herstad** (473-3733) welcomes any photos that anyone might have of the Speedway. Dr. Herstad will share his research into the Speedway's story at the THS meeting at 7 p.m. Monday, Jan. 13, at Tacoma Public Library.
- **Marcia Willoughby Tucker** (564-0869) is working on a history of Tacoma's Titlow Beach area and would like to hear from anyone with reminiscences of the early days, up to 1950. She is the author of *Day Island: a Glimpse of the Past*.

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A calendar of THS programs from founding in September 1989 into 1992

September 1989 – Organizational meeting and tour of the Knights of Pythias Bldg.

October 1989 – Local authors discussed their works at the Rhodes Post, American Legion Hall.

November 1989 – Business meeting at the McCormick Branch, Tacoma Public Library.

December 1989 – Curator Lynn Anderson updated the remodeling project at the Washington State Historical Society. King Branch.

January 1990 – Business meeting and election held at the King Branch, Tacoma Public Library.

February 1990 – Program held on the history of Tacoma's waterfront and the Longshoremen's Union. Guest speakers were longshoremen Phil Lelli and "Tiny" Thronson and author Dr. Ronald Magden. King Branch.

March 1990 – Ron Karabaich gave a presentation on the history of Old Town. King Branch.

April 1990 – Barbara Fox of Fox's Book Store spoke on 51 years of book-selling in Tacoma. King Branch. Participated in the Point Defiance Line celebration held by Pierce Transit and the Proctor District community.

May 1990 – Gary Fuller Reese gave members a tour of the newly restored Carnegie Bldg., then spoke on the history of Tacoma's Afro-American community.

June 1990 – Jim Fredrickson shared his knowledge of railroading in Tacoma area. King Branch.

July 1990 – Downtown Walking Tours.

August 1990 – Downtown Walking Tours; picnic at Wright Park and tour of the park.

September 1990 – Tribal Archivist Judy Wright gave a presentation of the history of the Puyallup Tribe. Carnegie Bldg. Attended Russian American exhibit at the Washington State Historical Society.

Help Wanted:

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- We need a volunteer to maintain the Tacoma Historical Society's display at the Tacoma Public Library. Contact **Polly Medlock**, 752-7722.
- Last year the society was the recipient of Everett Sweet's collection of photos of Mount Rainier – more than 800 images in all. A volunteer is needed to help catalog the collection. If you can help, call **Ron Magden**, 759-5196.
- **Memorabilia wanted:** If you have books, papers, photos, articles, paintings, drawings, etc. relating to Tacoma's history, we're interested. Call the society's phone line, (253) 472-3738, and let us know.

October 1990 – Program on labor history and the production of the book *To Live In Dignity*. Guest speakers: Otilie Markholt, author Roy Parent, and Clyde Hupp, Pierce County Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO. Camegie Building.

November 1990 – Fred Haley spoke on the history of Brown & Haley Candy Co. Rhodes Post, American Legion.

December 1990 – Members shared their reflections on Christmas in Tacoma over the years. Gary Fuller Reese spoke on Christmas in Territorial Days. Camegie Library.

January 1991 – Mary Sudar gave slide presentation on the pioneer artist Abby Williams Hill. Carnegie Library.

February 1991 – Tour of the Masonic Temple at 47 St. Helens Avenue led by Robert Fletcher. Organ music provided by Homer and Jane Johnson.

March 1991 – Presentation on Baseball in Tacoma and the story of Cheney Stadium by Leo Liebert and Bob Christofferson. Carnegie Library.

April 1991 – Murray Morgan presentation.

May 1991 – Walking tour of the Stadium/Seminary District by historian Judith Kipp.

June 1991 – Program on genealogy by Janet Baccus. Carnegie Library.

July 1991 – Professor William Baarsma spoke on the history of government in Tacoma.

August 1991 – Tour of Oakwood Cemetery led by Fred Stiegler.

September 1991 – Program on the ASARCO Smelter and the ethnic history of Ruston by labor historian Otilie Markholt and researcher Robert Gunovich.

October 1991 – Tour of the renovated Rialto and Pantages theaters.

November 1991 – Paul Raymond presentation on marine history entitled "Sail and Steam on Puget Sound."

December 1991 – Tour of Fort Lewis Military Museum.

January 1992 – Tacoma Historical Writers Group told the story of their publication, *Tacoma Voices from the Past*.

February 1992 – Architect Alan Liddle spoke on historic preservation and presented his award-winning slide show, "Whither Tacoma."

March 1992 – Program celebrating the 100th year anniversaries of the Aloha and Nesika study clubs.

April 1992 – Charles Moore, architect for the University of Washington Tacoma Branch and Washington State Historical Society.

May 1992 – Bill Allard presented his collection of gasoline station paraphernalia.

June 1992 – Tour of Casablanca Edgecliff.

July 1992 – Stadium High School tour. An insider's view conducted by the principal of the school.

THE TACOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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TACOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Regular meetings

November 18th, 2002, Monday—7:00 PM

Auditorium of Tacoma Public Library

David Nicandri, director of the Washington State
Historical Society, will share his thoughts on

“What If Old Tacoma Had Been the Only Tacoma?”

December 9th, 2002, Monday—7:00 PM

Auditorium of Tacoma Public Library

A panel will discuss

“December 7, 1941—

War in the South Pacific and Tacoma”

January 13th, 2003, Monday—7:00 PM

Auditorium of Tacoma Public Library

Dr. Wayne Herstad will share his research on

“The Tacoma Speedway”

CITY OF DESTINY NEWS

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Join THS Today

Membership in THS is open to all and
is tax deductible.

Individual \$25

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