New Tacoma’s First Hotel

The Blackwell Hotel, which opened Jan. 1, 1874 and lasted until 1884, was New Tacoma’s first hotel. Mr. and Mrs. William Blackwell managed the hostelry built by the Northern Pacific Railroad on the NP Dock on Commencement Bay. The railroad occupied the lower floor. Two years after construction the hotel was moved back near the bluff and NP quarters were removed. The present-day address would be 200 Schuster Parkway. The Blackwell was superseded by the famed Tacoma Hotel, built in 1884, and the structure was demolished in 1901.

In the files of Tacoma Community College there remain several hundred student reports from the ten years of Murray Morgan’s Northwest History classes. In this issue we bring you the conclusion of one written by Nettie Dillard in 1972, as edited by Charlotte Medlock.

Life in Tacoma, 1874

The year 1874 brought few changes to New and Old Tacoma. Construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad was progressing steadily but the economy remained the same. The population of New Tacoma was about 125 whites

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* Early-day broadcasting on the Sound. Page 3.
* Tacoma, a poem by Jack Sundquist that encompasses the sweep of Tacoma’s history. Pages 4-5.
‘Dorthea’s Journey’ offers insight into Norwegian-American experience

Immigrants from Norway and their descendants – devout, hard-working, capable and grateful for their opportunities in this new land – helped shape the character of this city of ours. Foss Tug and the storied Foss family, Pacific Lutheran College, Normanna Hall and pages of Andersons, Olsons and Johnsons in the telephone book are all part of Tacoma’s Norwegian legacy.

*Dorthea’s Journey*, a book that takes family history as its starting point, does a fine job of searching out roots in Norway, describing the discouraging conditions of life in the Old Country, and illuminating the Norwegian experience in America. Dorthea is Karen Dorthea Olsdatter Kongsgaarden (1803-1872), who was the great great great grandmother of the author, *State Sen. Shirley Winsley of Fircrest*. As a 52-year-old widow, Dorthea made the courageous decision in 1855 to leave Norway and build a new life on the hardscrabble Minnesota frontier. Winsley describes Dorthea as “the Rock of Gibraltar” and makes her the foundation block of her narrative.

The book describes the privations and dangers of frontier life, particularly for the women. Disease claimed many lives, attacks by Indians were a threat, and the specter of crop failure and famine loomed.

While the pay and the promise of adventure were enticing, the Civil War took a great toll of young Norwegian men. Three of Dorthea’s sons enlisted in the Union cause; two of them did not return, victims not of bullets but disease or prisoner camp conditions. At Gettysburg, the First Minnesota Volunteers lost 82 percent of their men in a valiant and critical charge of the Confederate line; the next day it lost more in the repulse of Pickett’s famous charge.

Though the Norwegian pioneers found comfort and strength in their Lutheran faith, the church does not always appear in a favorable light. Winsley notes, for instance, that pastors in Norway tried to discourage and hinder immigration. And she observes that “before emigrating from Norway, most Lutherans were fun-loving people.” But the surge of emigration to America coincided with the Haugean movement in Norwegian Lutheranism – a grass-roots pietism that regarded any sort of fun with great suspicion. The itinerant revivalist Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824) had a great influence on the clergy and on Norwegian Lutherans. (It’s revealing that students at Pacific Lutheran were forbidden to engage in such frivolity as card-playing and social dancing until the 1960s.)

Winsley’s personal history illustrates the Minnesota-Puget Sound connection. She was born on the family homestead in Polk County, Minn. In 1943, her widowed mother, Helga Miller, came west with her three daughters to Tacoma, where she found work at the Todd Shipyards as “Helga the Riveter.”

*Dorthea’s Journey* is packed with maps and photos and is extensively documented. It even takes a look at the Norwegian relatives who stayed at home. It will leave you with renewed respect for the Norwegians who built new lives in America.

(Winsley’s book is self-published, and she has made it available at no cost. A limited number of complimentary copies will be available when Sen. Winsley addresses the Tacoma Historical Society in May.)

—Dale Wirsing

Historic preservation officer appointed for Tacoma

The City of Tacoma again has a historic preservation officer. Jennifer Schreck has been appointed to the post, succeeding Virginia Anderson.

The Olympia native graduated from Whitman College and earned a master of science degree in historic preservation at the University of Oregon. She is a member of the City of Olympia Heritage Commission. Her previous work includes Union Station and First Hill in Seattle, and the Chehalis downtown and residential historic districts.

In her new post, Schreck will work with the Landmarks Preservation Commission, assist property owners seeking historical designation, and monitor historic districts and individual landmarks for conformance to established guidelines.

She can be reached at (253) 591-5220 or by e-mail at jschreck@cityoftacoma.org.
Broadcasting on the Sound began small, grew into giant

Paul Herlinger, a broadcasting industry veteran and a familiar voice to many Tacomans, was guest speaker at the society’s Sept. 10 meeting on the development of radio and TV in the Tacoma and Puget Sound areas.

His opening remarks described the difficulty of separating Tacoma from Seattle in the early development of radio and TV. Most of the action was in Seattle, and the entire industry, no matter where, was always very technology-driven — from its earliest moments when Morse experimented with code signals over wires, when Bell changed code to voice transmission, Marconi sent signals without wires, and Lee De Forest revolutionized the whole business with the development of the electronic vacuum tube.

Early radio was made up mostly of any amateur radio operator who had something to broadcast. KJR became the first licensed radio station in the Northwest. Radio fever really took hold after the world heard about the Titanic and the famed Dempsey-Carpentier boxing match via radio.

Early radio stations were often affiliated with churches, colleges, or newspapers. The Tacoma Ledger started its radio station, KGB, in 1921. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer started KFC. Everything on the air was live — no recordings. Most broadcasts were lavish live music shows. The first network radio sports show came to the Puget Sound region from the Rose Bowl on New Year’s Day 1927, with Graham MacNamee doing play by play, over KFOA, owned by Rhodes Department Store. The Fisher Flour family was also among the first in the radio business, owning two stations, KJR and KOMO. In the 1930s radio flourished despite (and maybe because of) the Depression, when people needed diversion. Now, radio and newspapers began competing for advertising dollars and in news reporting.

The ’30s also gave birth to radio drama, when bit players in the Seattle area got 50 cents per show and leads earned $3.00. Actors included the then not-so-famous Frances Farmer, Howard Duff, Art Gilmore and Steven Hill, all local people. One of the most famous names in radio and TV news started at a little Seattle 100-watter, KPCB, as a way to put himself through school at $15.00 a month. He did book reviews, played operas, and rewrote newspaper stories for his radio news shows. His name was Chet Huntley.

Little KPCB was eventually bought by a shrewd New York businessman named Saul Hass, who changed its call letters to KIRO. It became the first station in the region to achieve a full 50,000 watts of power.

World War II temporarily halted radio’s development, but ongoing experiments in recording media resulted in the development of wire recording — novel but totally useless for editing purposes — 16-inch glass discs (transcriptions) which were also uneditable, and finally, in the mid ’40s, audio tape came along, revolutionizing the broadcast and recording industries.

Postwar years saw television come to the fore (although early experiments in TV go back as far as 1884 in Germany). President Roosevelt’s opening of the New York World’s Fair in 1939 was televised. The first TV station in the Northwest and on the West Coast north of Los Angeles was KRSC, which was eventually bought by the Bullitt family and became KING-TV. The first live TV newscast in the Northwest was in 1951 on KING with newsman Charles Herring.

In 1952 The Tacoma News Tribune’s application for a TV license was OK’d, and on March 1, 1953, the region’s second TV station, KTNT, went on the air. It later became a CBS affiliate. Herlinger joined KTNT in 1956 and became the station’s public affairs producer, creating numerous documentaries, including programs about the famous collapse of the first Narrows Bridge (“Galloping Gertie,” Nov. 7, 1940) and the first documentary about safety in the air before the nation’s sophisticated air traffic

Continued on page 6
TACOMA
By Jack Sundquist

The wooded bluffs looked down upon the circling bay,
The river poured its dark brown gift through brushy flats,
The seagulls glided over or walked along the shore,
Their cries echoing in the stillness.
In the fall the multitudes of geese and ducks came and went,
And deer within the silent woods raised their heads to hear
their cries.
Along the shores were myriads of clams and oysters, crabs
and mussels,
And in the deepening waters fish swam lazily.
The fall brought legions of salmon fighting to ascend the riv-
ers and streams to spawn and die and leave their bodies to
the eagles.
Above them the mountain loomed,
They were waiting ….

I. THE FIRST TO COME
Dark-eyed, wary, brown-skinned, pushed on by others,
From the north they came, along the wooded shores.
Seeking a place, a shelter, a home.
They stopped beneath a sheltering bluff, in a circling bay,
To spend a night or two, beside a small stream.
The women said, “It is good here …
Clams, oysters, berries in the woods, water.”
The men said, “It is good here,
Salmon so thick they crowd the river there,
Deer in the forest, ducks on the flats!
Here we are sheltered from the wind.”
So they stayed, and the men built a strong wooden house for
all,
Girdling a giant patiently, talking to it as a friend,
Splitting it into wide boards with stone tools, using the sur-
plus
For a fire to warm the families on cold wet nights,
Telling their children the story of how they came.
And so they stayed, the women gathered berries in the woods,
And wapato, potato-like, and clams along the beach,
And guided the girls in their ways, “This is the way we do
this.”
And the girls listened.
And the men instructed the boys, “This is the way we catch
the salmon, remember to have the ceremony of the first
salmon caught,
And honor him or he will tell his brothers not to return.
And this is how to hunt the deer, remember them.”
And the children played along the beach and in the deep
woods
And learned the ways of their fathers and mothers.
Generations passed, each place was named,
Ta-had-owah, welcome, for the head of the bay,
Ta-wand-sham, fording place, a later waterway,
Chu-baul-up, sheltered place, a future Old Tacoma,
Sgut-us, face sticking out, the towering point of land,
And high above on the bluff, Tak-too-sul, to make signal,
Whose towering trees would become towering buildings,
And the looming white clad mountain they called Tah-ho-mah,
The dwelling place of God.

II. THE EXPLORERS
They came in white winged houses upon the water,
Wondrous to see,
Along tree-lined shores
Light-skinned men, bearded,
With sticks that sounded like thunder,
Spouting forth smoke and fire.
They traded wondrous knives and axes, shining, smooth,
That did not break and held an edge.
All these for simple sea otter skins.
Carefully they mapped the islands and the shore,
Placing their own names in each place,
For people, Vashon, Puget, Bainbridge,
Sgut-us, face sticking out, became Point Defiance,
In the eyes of those who knew war so well,
And the looming white-clad mountain the natives revered
As the dwelling place of God they named Rainier,
For a faraway silk-clad lord of the sea.

III. THE SETTLERS
There is money in these trees, he said to himself.
I will build a dam here, a waterwheel there, place the saw
here,
And so he did, and the whine of the saw echoed through
the trees, and the deer raised their heads to this new
sound.
The natives came to sit enthralled at the sound and the ease
With which the boards were made.
Men came to work in the mill,
Men came to grow food to sell to them.
Women came to help the men and ease their loneliness,
For man cannot live long alone,
And ships came to anchor in the bay awaiting the lumber.
Delin was his name, a man of vision.
Then came Swan to fill barrels with salted salmon,
To send to hungry San Francisco, and Baird to make the bar-
els.
Now the white man spoke of taking the native’s land,
And there were angry words and drummings and warcries.
In a driving rain the white would flee in the dark of night,
And leave the mill and buildings in solitude, untouched by
natives.
Later, others would come, Job Carr, building a lean-to against
a giant fallen log at Chebaulip because it was a quiet place,
with good water, a shelter from the great war in the East.
And he sent for his sons. “This is the place,” he said.
Peter Judson planted oats at Tak-too-sul, casting eyes over the

Jack Sundquist, a retired educator, is a native Tacoman.
His poem, Tacoma, was published in Tacoma Voices of the
Past, Vol. II.
circling bay, and his niece, Gertrude, casting eyes at Nicholas Delin, and he at her, and they were wed.
Others came, some to stay and some to go again, Seeking a rainbow, the Stewarts, the Steeles, the Starrs. They cut the trees and cleared the land, and planted oats and wheat and corn and each family built a separate house and each man laid out the limits of his land and said, “This is mine!”
And the natives watched and wondered, “How can they take the land that belongs to God? And they tear up the land and put seeds in it, and so they do not have to search for the plants!”
And the looming mountain watched the torn earth and falling trees.

IV. THE BUILDERS
He had dreams, this man, to build a city, at the end of the rainbow that was the railroad. Delin sang the praises of the bay and he came to see,
He saw upon the wooded hills a city of tree-lined streets, homes, stores, churches, and crowds of people where only trees stood silently and the only sound was the wind.
McCarver drew his plans and placed Commencement City across the face until Ritz said, “Why not Tacoma, I like the sound and meaning?” And so it was.
Griggs, Hewitt, Weyerhaeuser, looked upon the endless forests and visioned them as timbers and houses and doors and windows for the world. Wheeler and Osgood looked upon the trees and visioned them as houses to put upon the lots that he would sell. He drew more lines and separated the land again and again.
And visionaries sought out the black rocks in the surrounding hills and bought the land and brought the men to pierce the hills to bring out the rock to send out into the world.
And men drew lines upon the maps and other men built steel rails to join the new Tacoma to the world. And men planned together to bring the ships from the world to come and leave the products and take other products, and men came to load the ships and unload them, and women came to help the men and take care of the houses and write down on paper the things that were needed.
And the mills and factories devoured the forests And belched forth timbers and doors and furniture And smoke rolled forth so the streets were darkened at noon. And men built ships to go forth and net the salmon And other men dug deep tunnels into the mountains for hidden ores And the call went out; “We need more men to work in the mills, And in the fields, and in the mines, and on the ships!”

V. THE IMMIGRANTS
They heard the call around the world and spoke to each other, around The dinner table, outside the church, resting in the fields, A man speaking to his wife in the dark of the night, “Can we better ourselves? To go so far we risk so much! To leave our home and friends forever?”
And some said yes and some said no, and some said, “I will go and make some money and return and buy a farm here.”
The Welsh said, “I can work in the mines here as at home And make much more money and I can send for my family.” And they did.
The Dalmatian said, “I can fish here as I did at home and make much more money and I can send for my family.” And he did.
The Norwegian said, “I can farm here as I did at home, or work in the woods or on ships, and I can make much more money. And I can send for my brothers and sisters.” And he did.
The Greek said, “It is cooler here but the ground is rich and the air is freer and I can work at many jobs and make much money and I will send for my family.” And he did.
And their names were legion: John-son, Matsui, Martinolich, Jones, Wing, O’Brien, Polish, Italian, Greek,
And they clustered together so the women could talk over the fence as they hung their wash and the men could talk in the cool of the evening.

Loading lumber at the Tacoma Mill (1880), the second-largest lumber mill in the Pacific Northwest. The cargo was destined for San Francisco. It took six weeks to load a vessel, board by board.

Ron Magden collection

And they built their churches for their marriages and funer-als, St. Rita’s, St. Nicholas, St. Patrick’s, the Swedish Lutheran.
And horses pulled jangling wagons where deer once made their silent way,
The giant trees fell, dragged to whining saws,
No longer were they spoken to as friends, and asked to give their woods.
Mills sprang up along the shores, And logs poured in from the hills, And lumber flowed out.

Continued on page 6
**TACOMA  Continued from page 5**

To return to the hills as houses painted red and green and brown,
And men came to work in the mills.
And women came to ease their loneliness
And bear their children and make the houses homes.
And schools were built,
And stores
And docks
And warehouses
And factories to build doors and windows and furniture,
And railroads came
And ships
To bring new people
And carry away the new products.
And Tacoma grew
Built by those who sought a better life,
From New York and Boston,
Kansas and Minnesota,
Germany and Wales,
Japan and Sweden,
Italy and China.
From the far-flung world they came
To build Tacoma
By the circling bay
Where once deer stood silently
Listening to the calls of wild ducks.

**This and that**

✎ Gordon Russ, (253) 752-5583, is working on a project of identifying the mills that once lined Commencement Bay in Old Town and placing brass markers along Ruston Way. Mr. Russ brought his idea to the society’s board in November and is working on locating sources of funding.

✎ Everett Sweet has donated his lifetime collection of photos of Mount Rainier (Mount Tacoma if you prefer) to the society. Mr. Sweet has relocated to Hawaii. The collection consists of more than 800 images. Any volunteers to help catalog it?

✎ Ever wonder what became of the Milwaukee Road Museum that was housed in Tacoma’s Freighthouse Square? It’s alive and well in Cle Elum, where the Friends of the South Cle Elum Depot are restoring the building as a historical resource.

*More in an upcoming issue.*

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**Broadcasting on the Sound…  Continued from page 3**

system went into operation. Herlinger stirred audience comments and memories when he told of directing such programs as “Brakeman Bill” and “Romper Room."

In 1953 three more TV stations began operations – KMO in Tacoma, KVOS in Bellingham, and KOMO in Seattle. A battle over CBS ensued between KTNT and KIRO, with KIRO eventually winning the affiliation and the Tribune Publishing Co. selling KTNT, which became a very profitable independent station with call letters KSTW.

Tacoma was instrumental in getting public television started when two local school districts applied for educational TV licenses – Clover Park and Tacoma. Clover Park’s station KPEC went on the air in the early ’60s as did KTPS, the Tacoma Schools station. In 1967 Herlinger left KTNT and joined the Clover Park station, where he became an executive producer for public affairs programming. There he produced many more documentaries, including two nationally televised shows – “Ducks or Docks” about attempts to turn the Nisqually Delta into a deep-water port, and “What Happens to Me,” about the Tacoma Smelter and related environmental concerns.

Today Herlinger’s voice is heard narrating PBS programs as well as on many local and regional commercials and videos. He is also heard internationally as the lead character, “Whit,” on the Christian radio drama series “Adventures in Odyssey.”
and 250 Chinese. There were but three hotels. The tax assessment of Pierce County was $702,017. Returns showed 293 dwelling houses and 230 families.

Old Tacoma's first settler, Job Carr, had located here on Puget Sound at Chebaulip in 1864. He was the town's first mayor, postmaster, and appointed first election officer. In May the county commissioners authorized the formation of a town government for Old Tacoma and on July 8th the first election took place. There were three tickets: People, Citizen and Independent.

Judge S. S. White built a house on the corner of Starr and Seventh Street in Old Tacoma. It was the first to have shutters.

A retail milk business was begun by Byron Barlow and John Wren, the boatman/wood dealer. Wren was employed as first agent; unfortunately he died just a few days earlier.

N. S. Pierce was hired as the first mail clerk on the Northern Pacific Railroad, and the first money order office was established in May.

Because of a scarcity of coins in Tacoma, used especially for mill payrolls, a curious coin called a “slug” was used (devised) in 1874. It was not minted; it was just a chunk of plain gold valued at $50.00. There were also tokens of brass and iron used to substitute for small coins.

In January, a package of currency en route to Tacoma was stolen from the express company. The $8,000 was to be sent on to Alaska for Major W.A. Rueber to pay U.S. soldiers. The money was finally found beneath a house, hidden in an old boot packed away in a pile of wood. Later Clarence Fagan confessed and named young F. L. Budlong of Kalama and Clark Morris, an express agent, as accessories to the robbery.

A bell was added to Saint Peter’s Church on North Starr Street. It was a gift from the children of St. Peter’s Church in Philadelphia. Its weight was 1,000 pounds and it was placed not in the church belfry but on a 48-foot-high stump with ivy planted at the base.

On May 21, 1874, New Tacoma was incorporated as a town independent of Old Tacoma. William Fife was the first official; he was also appointed the town’s first postmaster.

Mr. and Mrs. (William) Blackwell opened their new hotel near the wharf alongside the Northern Pacific Railroad. It was the Blackwells’ wish that newcomers to Tacoma would find a place to stay with no difficulty. Many celebrities stayed there, and a great many delightful entertainments were held at the hotel.

Much building occurred on Pacific Avenue in 1874. In January, Dr. H. C. Bostwick, Tacoma’s first physician, and his partner, Davis, opened a drugstore on the southwest corner of Seventh Street and Pacific.

Beginning classes in Tacoma’s first school were held on the second floor over a store. William Fife installed the first water pipes in New Tacoma. Sidewalks were laid by George W. Fairhurst, owner of the California Hotel. They led from the hotel to Rainier Hall. Charles B. Wright ordered plans for the first brick building to be erected on the southwest corner of Ninth and Pacific, and building began soon after. Grading the roadway was done by volunteers of the little community starting at South Eighth Street and continuing on in a southerly direction. Pacific Avenue from the hotel and the wharf to the top of the hill was graded a width of 80 feet and was referred to as a “magnificent drive.”

Tacoma held its first Fourth of July celebration in 1874. Whites and Indians joined together to celebrate the day with proper ceremonies on the reservations. Dr. S. Hemenway was principal speaker. Others were General Milroy, agent for Indian Affairs, and the Rev. George Sloan, who read the Declaration of Independence.

The first baseball game was held in August. The team, known as the Tacoma Invincibles, organized on the 8th of August and was ready to play on the 20th. Kribs was captain of one team and Palmer captain of the other. That game, the first and last for the Invincibles, ended after six innings; the score was 29 to 28.

Burials took place at the Oakwood Cemetery. The first, on June 11th, was Frances D. Coulston, age 19 years and 5 months and daughter of Mrs. Roat (now McNeil). General M. M. McCarver was the second to be buried there in the following year.

The first child to be born in New Tacoma was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Anderson. A town lot had been offered to the first child born. Very soon after the Anderson girl’s birth there was born a boy to another Anderson family. Mistakenly the parents of the boy prepared for recognition of the event and gift of the land, which caused considerable humorous comment. Some rivalry appeared between the two families, both bearing the name “Anderson.”

Thus ended the year 1874 with 21 houses on Pacific Avenue and a few more scattered about in the surrounding neighborhoods.
Regular meeting – Olympic Room – Main Auditorium

January 14th, 2002, Monday–7:00 PM
City of Destiny and The South Sound:
An Illustrated History of Tacoma and Pierce County
(new views on local history)
Dr. Caroline Gallacci, author
founder of and former president of THS

Book signing at the meeting.
Sale Price: $54.25 (includes sales tax)

Books may be purchased at the meeting or at the following locations:
Old Town Photo
Dr. Ron Magden – 759-5196
Marie Hayden – 759-4451
Pacific Northwest Shop
Culpepper Books on Proctor

All proceeds go to the Tacoma Historical Society Museum Fund

February 11th, 2002, Monday–7:00 PM
“Gone with the Rain”
Attorney Tom Stenger
Corporate Counsel, Martin Luther King Housing

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