



# Rainier Oregon Historical Museum

Established. 2015

Find us at “[www.rainiermuseum.org](http://www.rainiermuseum.org)”

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## The Ferry Elsinore

By Mike Clark



The Elsinore ferried workers from Rainier to several destinations in the 1940s and 1950s

*Notice: I relied on old newspaper clippings (with conflicting facts), 70 year old memories, and myth to write this story. Due to a lack of space, some minor details were omitted. They will be added to our museum webpage. On a personal note, my dad Nelson Clark rode the Elsinore to the Longview Fibre starting in 1947 until 1952.*

On the evening of July 21, 1961, the 46-year-old Ferry Elsinore was set ablaze, becoming a bonfire for the opening of the third annual Rainier Daze. A sad ending for a boat that was built as a pleasure craft, commandeered as a patrol boat during World War 1 and worked as a ferry for nearly two decades carrying workers across the Columbia River.

The Elsinore was built in 1915 for Milton B. Henderson, of the Portland Yacht Club, by O. P. Graham, a Portland boat builder, and was the pride and joy of her owner. The boat was 38 feet long, cost Henderson \$1800 for materials and labor, except for the 16 horse power Atlas engine which Henderson purchased for \$800 from the Imperial Gas Engine Co., of San Francisco. The hull was built from the best grade of straight-grained fir. Henderson commented that the 16 horses made the Elsinore go a good 8 knots, and that all told it cost him less than \$3,000.

When World War I broke out, the government commandeered the Elsinore, over Henderson's objections, and took her to Coos Bay to patrol the spruce logging that was done there as part of the war effort. After the war, the boat was offered for sale and Ernest H. Allen, of Portland, purchased it at a government auction. Allen used the boat at the Portland Yacht Club for more than 20 years, and it was said that it roamed the Alaskan waters. It was sold in early 1943 to Ferris Brooks, a Rainier ferry operator for use between Rainier and Longview. The Elsinore replaced the ferry that Brooks owned that was destroyed in a fire. Besides taking Rainier workers to the Longview mills, he hauled men from Longview to the Klepp shipbuilding plant in Rainier.

Before the opening of the Longview-Rainier Bridge in 1930, Rainier workers, employed at the Longview mills, relied on two auto/passenger ferries, the "Washington" and "Oregon" to get to work. They were operated by Long Bell that started in 1922. But after the bridge opened on March 29, 1930, the ferry service was discontinued.

For a Rainier worker, using the new bridge, it was a \$1.00 round trip toll, more than the average hourly wage (the Fibre was offering a base rate of .90 an hour in January 1945). Carpooling helped in sharing the cost, it was a .20 round trip toll for passengers. The toll was later adjusted, costing an auto with 3 or more passengers \$1.00 one way with a reduced toll returning. The only other alternative was taking a passenger ferry that soon started after the bridge opened that transported the passengers almost directly to their place of work. The initial fare for a round trip on the Elsinore was 25 cents, with it later going up to 40 cents.

In November of 1943 Brooks decided to retire from the ferry business and sold the Elsinore to S. F. Inman of Astoria who continued operating the ferry service in Rainier. Shortly after acquiring the ferry, Inman went before the city council and asked if the wooden pedestrian walk plank to his ferry float could be improved. The walk plank came off "A" street opposite East Third Street. His request was granted, with conditions.

Sometime in 1944 Wellington (Mac) McCollam bought the Elsinore. In August 1945 the Rainier Review reported that McCollam was rebuilding the Elsinore with the help of William Fisher. A new 115 horse power Chrysler marine motor, valued at \$1,000, was installed, moved forward out of the passenger compartment, and the toilet facilities were removed. The interior was rearranged allowing additional seating with a new capacity of 40 or more passengers. The new motor would allow the Elsinore a rated speed of 22 miles per hour.



Included in the purchase of the Elsinore was a smaller boat named the Standard that was also used as a ferry, but it had a smaller capacity of only 12 to 14 passengers. It was a 26 foot long converted lifeboat off a WWI ship. It had a Standard motor (hence the name). Later, McCollam replaced the ferry Standard with another converted lifeboat

named the Red Wing (again named after the motor) and it was also known as Little Toot.

During the peak years in the 1940s, the Elsinore and the Standard made 12 regularly scheduled trips plus five emergency trips a day, carrying 100 to 175 passengers. Wellington McCollam had a ferry pilot license and so did William Fisher, William R. Williams and Orville Harrison who operated the ferries when needed.

In 1945 Wellington caught pneumonia and couldn't work. His son Robert (known as Bob) filled in for him. He was just 14. Bob had been helping his dad for the previous year, so it was decided he could be "captain" while his dad was sick. The Coast Guard turned a blind eye on this since Bob was too young to operate the ferry (18 was the minimum age). Later Bob worked mostly the night shift. He was paid \$100 per month.

The ferry only ran to the Longview Fibre landing (about a half mile from the mill) or to the Long Bell Landing - the ferry didn't go to both mills on the same trip. They also took six men to the Wasser Brothers Shingle Mill upstream of Rainier each day. They never ran their ferry to the Weyerhaeuser mill.



During World War II, gasoline was rationed, and they had trouble getting enough gas to run the ferry. R. P. "Dick" Wollenberg, the owner of Longview Fibre, needed the ferry to run so he could keep his mill running, so he told McCollam to take all the gas he needed from the mill's supply. Bob remembered that half of Rainier got some of the "extra" gas the Elsinore got from the Fibre.

During the time Elsinore plied the Columbia River, it was involved in two rescues and an almost disastrous collision with a Russian tanker. One rescue involved pulling aboard three Johnson brothers from Rainier who were having serious boat trouble near the bridge. One was unconscious, and he was brought to the McCollam boathouse for first aid. Another rescue was picking up ten men clinging to log rafts tied to a shear boom. It was the fishing season and two boats, that had five men each, capsized near the mouth of the Cowlitz River. Then on one dark night while crossing the river during the war years when having lights on were prohibited, the pilot sensed a motion in front of him. Breaking with blackout regulations he turned on the spotlight and realized they were on a broadside collision course with a Russian tanker that was quickly diverted.

By the 1950s ridership dwindled, mainly because of the bridge's new "commuter" rate that was lower. Bob recalled that his dad had to quit work in 1950 because of failing health. Bob and a brother kept the ferry running for a couple more years then stopped in 1952 when it became unprofitable. The Elsinore was sold, but the Red Wing was kept for a few more years and used for a few charter runs. However, in a June 8, 1961 Rainier Review article, it was reported that the Elsinore finally quit the river after a combination of dwindling patronage and damage during the winter of 1957.

Omar Rea became the next owner of the Elsinore with hopes of restoring her. But the needed repair work hadn't been done and after removing the Chrysler motor for salvage, it ended up in a vacant city lot where it decayed and eventually toppled over to one side.



In 1961 the Rainier Daze promotion committee saw an opportunity, turn the rotting hulk of the Elsinore into a large bonfire on the evening of July 21 to mark the beginning of the annual event that started the next day. The bonfire was also in tribute to a long time chief of the Rainier Fire Department, William Joseph, who supervised the event. But for many, the Elsinore became a fiery funeral pyre, signaling an end to another chapter in Rainier's history. All that was saved from the Elsinore was the pilot wheel now in the possession of Willard McCollam, Wellington's son.

But the memory of the Elsinore lives on for those who can still recall its daily trips across the river. And for those who are too young to

remember, or born after the ferry's cremation, there is a permanent exhibit at the Rainier Historical Museum, a model of the Elsinore created by Rainier artist, Phil Fake.

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Sources: Rainier (OR) Review issues: 1943-Apr-1, 1943-Nov-25, 1943-Dec-9, 1945-Jan-4, 1945-Aug-23, 1961-Jun-8, 1961-Jul-6. Interviews with Robert McCollam by Mike Perry January 2012, and with Willard McCollam by Margaret Barton-Ross April 2018. 1961 newspaper clippings from the Daily News and Oregonian. Photos courtesy of the Rainier Historical Museum.

# Museum News

By ROHM President Kay Heflin



## Ferry Elsinore model unveiled

On April 28<sup>th</sup> the model of the Elsinore, built by Rainier artist, Phil Fake, was unveiled at the Rainier Historical Museum located in the Rainier City Hall. Members of the community were present to witness this special event. Ron Fadden, a local cabinetmaker, made the base cabinet. The descendants of Frank and Virgie McCaskey donated the funds for the clear acrylic top to cover the boat model and Liz Brown, of Rainier, made the engraved plaques that were attached to the display case honoring those who made it all possible.

Also there is a new display of old documents and photos from the Rainier Water Commission dating back to 1907. These were found in a locked safe that Rick Vance had won at an auction.

## Museum building fund

On May 12, at a special executive meeting, Vice President Duane Bernard presented a proposal and prospectus to our museum board to start raising funds for a museum building fund. The proposal was passed by unanimous vote. The community room that we are sharing at the City Hall has restrictions and limits of what we can create and display. We desperately need a permanent location that will allow us to grow and to accomplish the goals and purpose of our museum, which is to educate, record, preserve and display the history of Rainier and its surrounding communities. We will begin to raise funds through donations by businesses and individuals, bequests and fund-raising activities. If you would like to donate to our building fund, you can use the enclosed membership form and note on the form and your check "Building Fund Donation."

## The Columbia County Heritage Association

On Saturday July 14<sup>th</sup> our museum will host the Columbia County Heritage Association. The Association includes museums from Columbia City, St. Helens, Scappoose, Vernonia, Rainier, Clatskanie and the Cowlitz Museum. Representatives from each museum meet quarterly to share ideas and events from each museum. Each meeting is held at a different museum, and we all learn something from each museum.

## Rainier Alumni All-Class Picnic July 29

Mark the date of Sunday, July 29, on your calendar. By request of the Stennick family, our museum is now hosting the Rainier Alumni All-Class Picnic at Hudson-Parcher Park. We will be adding some history to the picnic. We are looking for school class pictures from Rainier, Goble, Neer City, Hudson, Fern Hill and Delena and old photos of the school buildings. We will have school class photo albums on display and will be selling CD's of most of the Rainier yearbooks. Please bring any photos that you have into the museum so we have time to add them to our albums before July 29.

### Logging exhibit

Presently we are creating a logging exhibit that started after Memorial Day weekend and will run throughout the summer. We are looking for local logging pictures and logging items from our surrounding communities. We would also like pictures of local loggers from the past and the present. We will be creating a memorial for the loggers who have passed. If you have anything to add to our logging exhibit, please bring it to our museum on any Saturday, except holiday weekends, between noon and 4:00 P.M. or contact President Kay Heflin at Kaylynn2@hotmail.com or ph. 503-556 4089.

### Missing yearbooks

Our museum borrowed several copies of yearbooks from the High School when we had digital copies made of most of Rainier's yearbooks dating back to the early 1920's. Our museum would like to have a complete collection of the Rainier yearbooks. If you have any yearbooks that you would like to donate to our museum, we are missing the following yearbooks listed below. Also, duplicates are very much welcomed so that one can be archived and the other available for visitor use.

1923,1925,1926 & 1927

1930, 1931,1932,1933,1934,1935,1936 & 1938

1940,1943,1944,1945,1946,1947,1948 & 1949

1950 thru 1958

1963, 1968,1969, & 1970

1983,1986,1987,1988, & 1989

1990,1991,1992,1993,1994,1995,1996, & 1998

2000 thru 2017

You can drop your yearbooks off at the museum any Saturday, except major holiday weekends, between noon and 4:00 P.M. or mail them to: ROHM, P.O. Box 762, Rainier, OR 97048.

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### ROHM Board Members

Director, Rick Burnham



Rick Burnham is one of three directors on our museum board. Rick was born at the Cowlitz General Hospital in Longview in 1948. His family had just moved to a 50-acre farm in Fern Hill, above Rainier. His father, Elbert (Buck) Burnham, grew up about a mile beyond the farm where Rick now lives. Rick's mother, Althena, grew up in Goble. Rick married a Rainier girl, Annie Pritchard, in 1970. They raised four children and both taught elementary school in Rainier and retired in 2003. Being related to a large group of people in Rainier and Goble makes this area's history personal and relevant. Even though he has lived in Rainier for nearly 70 years, he still is learning more about

the people and this great community.

## New Membership

We now have a membership of 96 as of June 6, 2018. New members who recently joined us:

Janis Allen  
Kathy & Jerry Anderson  
Lowell & Teresa Bentley  
Dan & Jane Bernard  
Sherry Evans  
Ron & Tanya Fadden  
The Phil Fake Family  
Carol Girt  
Robert Harrison  
Ivan J. Jones

Marvin Gene Kellar  
Connie Krenik  
Karen & Dondi LaVallee  
Kat Mattison  
Steve McCaskey  
Jill Owens  
Lyle and Marcia Roberts  
John Stennick  
Alan Widme  
John Woolf/Dena Womack/Shawn Clark

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## Monetary Donations

We are grateful to the people and organizations who have donated to the Rainier Oregon Historical Museum between January 2018 and May 2018. Their gifts have made it possible for our museum to continue to grow.

Carl Baker  
William Barton  
Lowell & Teresa Bentley  
Alfred Berg  
Cornerstone Café  
Dale Fisher  
Claire Gerdes  
Carol Girt  
Vern Grimshaw  
Joyce Guasch  
Robert Harrison

William Harrison  
Rosalie Herstrom  
Roy Irwin  
Bernice Jamieson  
Mary & Henry Keith  
Connie Krenik  
Gordon McKee  
Betty Neer  
Paul & Judy Nys  
Sam & Wilma Patching  
Ed & Judi Ridderbusch

Mary Scott  
Earl Singleton  
Charles Skeans  
Roger & Lisa Thomas  
Sam & Marilyn Tift  
KC & Marilyn Van Natta  
Robert & Martha Van Natta  
Richard Vance  
David & Terisa Wellington  
Dick & Claralee Williams

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## Honoring Museum Member Volunteers

We love our volunteers who come on Saturdays and help us by assisting the board members with small, and LARGE, tasks. We have had volunteers greet people, set out picture books, dust, help with cataloging donations, help decorate display cases, and other duties. Following is a list of members (other than board members) who have volunteered, or who have signed up to volunteer over the last year: The board is very appreciative of the volunteer assistance.

Joanne Board  
Phil Butcher  
Mike Clark  
Linda Creamer  
Carol Everman  
Jan Everman

Sheridian Holland  
Toni Johnson  
Delyla Laughlin  
Judy Lepin  
Betty Neer  
Earl Singleton

John Stennick  
Beverly Spurgeon  
Tiffany Trahan  
Marilyn Van Natta  
Barb Wiburn  
Marvin Wilburn

If you would like to volunteer in the museum on Saturdays from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., please contact President Kay Heflin at 503-556-4089 or Vice President Duane Bernard at 503-556-9661.





# RAINIER OREGON HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Established. 2015

[www.rainiermuseum.org](http://www.rainiermuseum.org)

## Membership Application

**Thank You to all our members who continue to support our museum. You make it possible for our museum to exist.**

*I would volunteer to work in the museum or at museum events, yes\_\_ no\_\_*

*Individual \_\_ or Family \_\_ membership \$20 \_\_\_\_\_*

*Gift membership \$20 \_\_\_\_\_*

*\* Tax deductible donation:*

*Building fund donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_ or regular donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_*

*Total amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_*

*Print Name \_\_\_\_\_*

*Address \_\_\_\_\_*

*City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_*

*Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_*

*Newsletters sent to you by: email \_\_ or by mail \_\_*

*Signature \_\_\_\_\_*

**Enclose your check with this form and mail to: ROHM**

**P.O. Box 762**

**Rainier OR 97048**

*\*Contributions above the membership fee is a tax deductible charitable donation. ROHM is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization. Our tax ID # is 47-5361161.*

- Our yearly membership runs from January 1 through December 31.*

If you have any questions, you can contact the President of ROHM, Kay Heflin, at [kay-lynn2@hotmail.com](mailto:kay-lynn2@hotmail.com), cell# 360-751-7039 or Vice President Duane Bernard at [jdmbarnard@msn.com](mailto:jdmbarnard@msn.com), Ph.# 503-556-9661