



“Preserving the past for the future”

www.rainiermuseum.org / ROHM, PO Box 762, Rainier, OR 97048

ROHM Board Working Hard Towards Future Groundbreaking

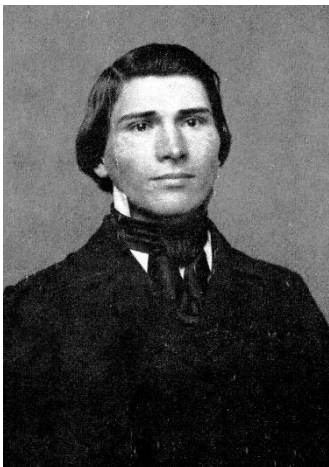


This illustration, provided by Lower Columbia Engineering, depicts the new ROHM museum once it is completed.

The ROHM museum board has been working diligently to secure all permits and funding needed and feels confident that construction will start soon. Once all criteria has been met to start this project, the board will announce a date for the groundbreaking.

Silas and Lydia Plimpton, Rainier 1853-1861

Compiled by Mike Clark

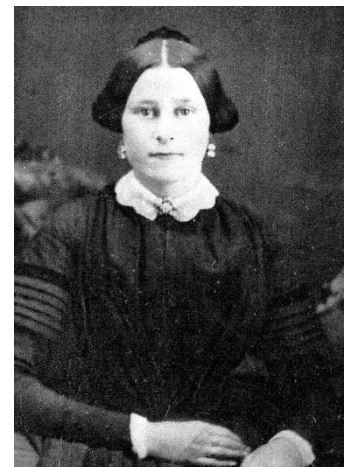


Silas Plimpton

Silas Bullard Plimpton (1) and Lydia Pollard Wright were married May 19, 1853, in the first wedding ceremony performed in the town of Rainier, Oregon Territory.

Their story was told in the article “Life on the Lower Columbia, 1853-1866” by Helen Betsy Abbott (2) in the Fall 1982 edition of the Oregon Historical Quarterly.

Abbott used letters written by both Silas and Lydia to family members on the east coast that gave a detailed account of their life in Rainier, Oregon, in the 1850s. What follows are selected parts of that story: (3)(4)



Lydia Plimpton

On February 20, 1852, Silas left Boston for San Francisco via Cape Horn on the ship *Victory* and arrived at San Francisco without mishap on June 23rd. His older brother William had been there at the California gold fields since 1849. He tried mining, but met with nothing but distress and very near death from typhoid fever that swept the mines. In early 1853 Silas had decided to go to Oregon and left San Francisco on the steamer *Columbia*. The mails were necessarily slow in those days, so he wasn't sure when (or if) Lydia would come. However, he left word in San Francisco for her to join him at Rainier, Oregon Territory. He and Lydia had agreed that she would follow him West once he was established.

Actually, Lydia had sailed from New York on March 5, 1853, in the company of Mrs. John S. Hawkins who, with her two children, were going to join Mr. Hawkins in Rainier. They sailed on the steamship *Star of the West* via the Nicaragua route. Crossing Nicaragua to the Pacific Coast was hazardous, the last 12 miles by mule train. From there Lydia boarded the steamer *S. S. Lewis* for San Francisco. Eighteen days later, with 385 passengers on board, the ship ran aground in the fog north of the Golden Gate and was a total loss. Passengers and baggage were saved.

Silas had just left San Francisco on the steamer *Columbia* bound for Oregon. Years later Silas wrote: "as fate would have it I sailed through miles of wreckage...while Lydia was ashore at Bolinas Bay, and was near enough to see the passengers on shore, but knew not of her being among them."

After a few days Lydia took the Brig *I B Lunt* for the Columbia River, landing at Rainier in May 1853. She married Silas on May 19, 1853, and went to housekeeping with only a bed, chair, stove, and little else. Silas was 26 and Lydia 19.

In a letter from Rainier to Lydia's parents, dated June 2, 1853, Silas wrote: "Yesterday she [Lydia] commenced keeping school. I think she will have between twenty & thirty scholars. She has six dollars a quarter & might have had ten had she asked it. The children are very backward & most of them never had but a small idea of schools. Lydia is abundantly able to teach such scholars as she has & if she can get six or seven hundred dollars a year it is much better than she could in the States. Mr. Hawkins & I are building a house & intend to move into it in a few days. We are staying with his family & shall do so for the present. I cannot say whether I shall settle here or not. Mr. [Charles E.] Fox the owner of the township has offered me a good chance & I have had inducements elsewhere but have declined excepting any propositions from any of them. We have not done planting as the water is to[o] high yet; the farmers plant as late as July & August. When Brother William comes [from California] I shall conclude what to do. I expect him soon; there is a great amount of work to be done here this summer. We have a church & school house dwelling houses & wharves to build; a steam saw mill is nearly completed; all our business men here are Yankees & some of them natives of Boston."

In a letter from Rainier to Lydia's brother Dexter, dated July 24, 1853, Silas wrote: "Perhaps a description of this part of our country might be of some little interest to you. By looking on your atlas you will see a small river emptying into the Columbia but a short distance from its mouth on the north side, it is the first river from its mouth that empties into the Columbia. You will see by your atlas that this river has no name attached to it. The name given to this is Cowlitz river, directly opposite this river or the mouth of it is where we live, we are situated on the south bank of the Columbia; the country on this side is very hilly & heavily timbered. The old growth of trees are now lying prostrate & cover a great portion of the land. I have traveled a great distance upon cedar logs that were three & four hundred feet long & from 4 to 10 feet in diameter such trees as these would surprise you were you to see them. Most of the timber that is standing is very large & lofty. The way we clear this land is some what singular - we bore holes in the trees & set them on fire with a match & they will burn down in a few days & then after they are down they will burn the inside of the tree all out & leave nothing but the sap & bark. We are building a house of this kind of material, we saw the log off eight feet long & then split it endways. these pieces are then placed upright on sills & forms the outside into half circles, this looks very odd yet it is very pretty. There are no pine trees in this country that I have seen & but very few oak; the greatest part of the timber is fir. Our crops look finely & if nothing happens we shall have 700 bushels of potatoes. Potatoes are selling for \$5.00 per bushel & have been selling for ten dollars. A man told me that he saw a man pay \$8.00 merely for the eyes of a bushel of potatoes. You may think this a large story but it is true. Some farmers made their fortune last year raising potatoes alone. I shall write you much more about the country soon as I intend to go to the top of Mount St Hellens; it is about three miles high & 30 miles from here. This is a volcano but it is covered with perpetual snow except in places where it is melted by the heat within."

In a letter from Rainier to Silas's brother Lowell, dated Nov 8th 1855, Silas wrote: "Well we cannot always expect peace but I have no taste for indian warfare but they chose their own course. We have built a Fort here which I think is strong enough to resist all their efforts. Many have been very much alarmed in this place. Some families reside in the Fort, and at one time we all stayed in it nights, but thinking our fears groundless to some extent we concluded to remain at our homes a while longer. One night not long sinse some men from Rainier were coming down the river when suddenly they discovered the light of a camp fire on each side of the Columbia River about three miles distant above this place; they made all possible haste to arouse the inhabitants of Rainier, two men came out to tell me and my neighbor of our danger. We got up and dressed and made all possible speed to town (distant 1/2 mile back). We assembled all the womin together with the children and stationed guards, but no indians that night made their appearance. We continued to keep the town guarded every night for some time, expecting the red skins down on us every moment, but as yet they have kept at a respectful distance. Our company at Rainier musters 30 guns. We can defend ourselves against all the indians in Oregon."

On September 10, 1854, their first child, William Wright Plimpton was born in Rainier. He went by the name of Willie. Willie passed away on January 17, 1936 in Portland at age 81.

In a letter from Rainier to Lydia's mother, dated April 25th 1856, Lydia wrote: "You need not give yourself any uneasiness about us on account of the Indians. As yet no hostile movement has taken place in our midst. On the oposite side of the river the families have left their claims and taken up their residence at Rainier at which place a fort was built last fall. Silas has entered a portion of his claim by paying at the rate of one dollar and a quarter an acre and has rented a farm on the river two miles below Rainier for which he pays eight hundred dollars, have from forty to fifty acres under cultivation. We have sixteen milch cows. We find a ready market for all the butter I can make at fifty cents a pound, have sold milk for the last three months at fifty cents a gallon."

Sometime between July 1856 and June 1857 Silas and family moved to Oak Point (5). In a letter from Oak Point, Washington Territory, dated July 21st 1857, Silas wrote: "We are still at Oak Point & enjoying good health. I find my work much easier than farming & as I get \$1200 a year & my family boarded it is much better than clearing the forests to make a farm. How long we shall stay here is uncertain but probably I shall not leave until I can do better elsewhere. My business is to measure lumber & see to loading vessels & oversee the out of door hands, attend to the store & Post Office, and see to getting provisions into the Boarding house. Oak Point belongs to a firm in San Francisco & they keep several vessels running all the time. There are two saw mills & a grist mill here which gives employment to thirty men & upwards."

By 1858 Silas found employment on board the Steamer "*Independence*." In a letter to Lydia's parents dated Aug 8th 1858, Silas wrote: "My home at the present time is almost anywhere on the Columbia River. I am running on the Steamer *Independence* for a short time. I say short time because I do not like the buisness. I have but little to do but keep the books, but the confinement I do not like, besides the boat is of the high pressure kind & we are liable to be elevated without due notice. Thus far we have had but two or three Steamboat explosions upon our waters, but since opposition and an increase of boats have come into existence you may expect to hear of more accidents. Lydia and Willie are in Portland now, but I think I shall take them back to Rainier this week. The large saw mill at Rainier was burned down last night. I saw it burning as we came past. Some person who has been wronged through the rascality of its owner is supposed to have set it on fire."

From Rainier, Lydia wrote to her mother in a letter dated April 1, 1859, "Silas is very busy now setting out trees and puting in his crops; the season is very backward on account of haveing so much rain, which causes all his work to come on all together. We have not seen one day entirely free from rain or snow since the first of Jan untill the past week. Now I will introduce to you another little granddaughter; unfortunately she has no name yet, so we call her baby. She is a pet with us all and Willie thinks there is nothing like his little sister. She is two months old." They later named her Lelia.

On August 20, 1859, Silas was gravely wounded, as described by him in a letter sent from Rainier to Lydia's parents dated February 5, 1860. Silas was companying his brother William and a man whose name was Phelps on a journey of about ten miles distant from his home. Having gone about three fourths of a mile Silas stopped and told them that he did not wish to go any farther as it looked like rain and he had some brush to burn. He told William and Phelps to along and he would return. Silas handed his rifle to Phelps to take with them. Silas wrote "I handed him my rifle supposing that he would take it and go along, but what should the fellow do but take the gun and point it at my head and breast. I put up my right hand to take the gun from him, but before I could take it he discharged the piece. The rifle was charged with shot, the contents took effect in my

right arm about four inches from my shoulder tearing the flesh from the bone and breaking the bone besides splitting the shaft in a horrid manner.” William left to find a surgeon that lived ten miles distant across the Columbia River in Washington Territory. Silas turned his steps toward home thinking perhaps he would bleed to death before he got half way. Phelps followed behind cursing himself for having done it. The trail to his house was beset with fallen timber and thick under brush. Every step he could feel the crunching of the bones. He met Lydia at the door and they examined the wound and found that the artery was not injured, so that he was in no danger bleeding to death. Phelps then went to Oak Point for another doctor. The accident happened at ten o’clock in the morning and William returned with a doctor at about four in the afternoon (after rowing across the Columbia River then up the Cowlitz River to a little town to find the doctor). The doctor did his best probing the wound and removing some shot. He had no instruments to amputate if it was necessary to do it. Silas wrote “I sent to Portland for another Doctor; it was about one week before he got here although I did not send for him until three days after the accident. The Doctors consulted the matter, thought I was in a bad fix, but they would try and save the arm if possible. You may be sure that I put in my plea for the arm for I knew that this country was not exactly the place for a man without his right arm. It was decided that I must lie on my back until the bone could knit, for it was impossible to set it with splints. We kept it wet with cold water all the time for the first three weeks. The wound was so large that we could put a handfull of lint into the cavity. I lie on my back six weeks without moving either to the right or left. I carried my arm in a sling about three months. I can not do much yet, the wound has just healed or nearly so. I cannot touch my head yet with my hand. I have become left handed although I cant write left handed and no doubt you will think by this time that I can't with my right but I do the best I can now.”

In a letter from Rainier to Lydia’s mother dated April 16, 1860, Lydia wrote: “We received your most kind and welcome letter, on the 6th of this month, and I will improve the first opportunity to answer it, although it is sad news which I have to communicate first. That is that our dear little Lelia has been called away from us. She died the first of April, she had been unwell for some weeks teething and had a bad cough which distressed her very much at times, but as she seemed lively and willing to amuse herself with her playthings we did not consider her dangerously sick untill about three days before she died, when her symptoms indicated inflammation of the lungs with high fever. On the day of her death she seemed a little better after haveing a quiet sleep I took her up and was holding her in my lap when Willie came up to her and asked her if she did not want to go out and see the chickens. She looked up to her bonnet (and when Willie got it), took it and put it in my hand for me to put it on for her, then pointed to the shawl that I put around her and asked for it, so pretty in her way. She seemed as anxious to go out as ever she did, she was just 14 months old, a good natured child and very inteligent too; each day we discovered some new trait to interest us and love her for. Oh how desolate the house seemed for a few days and even now I can hardly realize that she has gone never to return. When the house is still it seems as though she must be asleep up stairs; she used to take such long naps.”

In a letter Silas wrote from Westport, Oregon (5), to Lydia’s parents dated June 17th, 1861: “We moved from Rainier last February. I have just built a new house and we are now pleasantly situated, are 25 miles from Astoria. There are six or eight families within speaking distance. We are all well. War is the cry. We are all for the Union here.” Silas and Lydia’s daughter Sarah was born in Westport on September 13, 1863.

Silas sold the Westport place in October 1863 and moved to Oak Point again, where the family remained until they moved back to Westport in 1870 and farmed again. On January 10, 1872 the last of their children was born to Silas and Lydia - a son, Ortlely. Besides farming, Silas worked at Mr. West's store and mill. About 1890 the railroad was built between Portland and Astoria, taking a section of the best land of the Westport farm. In February that year the Westport property of nearly 400 acres was sold to Robert McMath, and Silas and Lydia moved to a small farm at Willsburg, near Milwaukie, Oregon. The real light went out of Silas’s life when Lydia died in 1903. After Lydia was gone, their son Ortlely, and his family lived on the farm with Silas until his death in 1913.

To this day, the Plympton Creek (1) flows through Westport, along where the Plimpton farm once stood.

Notes

(1) Silas spelled his surname as both Plimpton and Plympton. (2) Silas and Lydia Plimpton were Helen Betsy Abbott’s great-grandparents. (3) Helen Betsy Abbott’s article ran 40 pages. The entire Plimpton story is fascinating, but only a few of the highlights were included here. We encourage the reader to see the entire article located at the ROHM. (4) All misspellings in the Plimpton letters were left as is. (5) Oak Point, Washington is about 12 miles down the Columbia from present Longview. Westport, Oregon is about 22 miles down the Columbia from Rainier.

President's Message

by Kay Heflin, ROHM President

OREGON LEGISLATIVE SESSION DISAPPOINTS ROHM, BUT THERE IS STILL HOPE

Last July our museum applied for a \$500,000 grant to help build our new museum through the Cultural Advocacy Coalition of Oregon (CACO). A few months later we were excited to learn that our application was chosen from 37 applicants and would be included in a slate of 16 projects that were endorsed by CACO and would be sent to the Oregon Legislature for funding during the session that just ended the third week of June. Of the slate of 16 projects, the legislature only funded two projects, both in Portland. We are especially disturbed by the failure of policymakers to fund the CREF slate of capital projects, which has historically received state funding and even been added to - but never cherry-picked for its projects. This is the first time in 10 years that the Oregon Legislature has not funded all the Cultural projects put before the Capital Ways and Means Committee. We just found out that we have another chance that our grant will be funded by submitting a new bill to the legislature when they meet for a special session in January and February. We have spent countless hours writing this grant, sending emails to our legislators and Senator and made a special trip to Salem to meet with our legislators in April. Hopefully all this hard work won't be in vain. It will be March 5, 2024, before we hear if the legislature will fund our grant. Our groundbreaking may be delayed until we know if we will be receiving this grant.

We will keep trying. We just applied for two other grants totaling \$60,000. We can't count on the CACO grant and must keep working hard to raise money for our building fund. We raise money any way we can. We participated in the city-wide garage sale last week making a little money for the building fund. On August 12 we will be washing CRPUD Vehicles in Deer Island to raise \$500. We are working so hard to build a new museum in Rainier that our community will be proud of and will preserve Rainier's history. It will be a building with extra room to grow our collection and room for meetings and presentations. Please encourage your friends and family to become a member of ROHM for \$25 a year. You can also give a family member or friend a gift membership. Please phone 360-751-7039 or contact me at kay-lynn2@hotmail.com if you would like a blank membership application sent to you, if you want to donate to the building fund or volunteer to help us wash cars at CRPUD on August 12. Another way to raise money for ROHM is to remember loved ones who have passed, by requesting friends and family to make donations to the Rainier Oregon Historical Museum in their loved one's name. An accumulation of \$500 will put their name on our memorial plaque or building fund plaque.

For example: Lowell Bentley passed away April 1. Teresa, Lowell's wife, made a request that friends and family make donations in memory of Lowell to ROHM. Donations in Lowell's memory raised nearly \$3,000 for our building fund. Our museum board was deeply saddened and heartbroken for Teresa's loss (who is a member of our board of directors). Lowell will not be forgotten.

Information Requested

The Museum now has approximately 250 letters dating from 1943 to 1946, written by a Rainier veteran, Lyle Williams. Lyle graduated from RUHS in 1943. He is the son of Glen Williams, a grocer associated with the Rainier Mercantile (A.K.A Bob's Market). Glen was also chairman of the RUHS School Board in the 1950's.

Please send any information to Bill Harrison at eyedeedoc@gmail.com, or (702) 682-0315.

Thank you.





Meet Board Member Matt Alexander

Matt grew up in various neighborhoods of Portland, Oregon, and moved to St. Helens in 1998 where he graduated from St. Helens High School. He attended architecture school at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, California, and DIS in Copenhagen, Denmark, before moving back to Portland to begin working at an architectural firm. During his college and post-college years, he visited over 25 countries on five separate continents, but in the end, decided to move back to Columbia County to work for a local engineering/architecture firm. Matt became aware of the Rainier Oregon Historical Museum through his work, as he was assigned to design the new museum on West A Street. Through that process, he got to know the wonderful ROHM board members and was inspired by their dedication and enthusiasm for the history of their town and county.
Photo by Martha Van Natta.

ROHM acquires Rainier's 1936 Firetruck

By Mike Clark



On May 3, 2023, ROHM acquired the old 1936 Rainier Firetruck. It will be added to ROHM permanent collection once a museum building is constructed. It is presently stored in a safe location. Pictured above is Duane Bernard at left, being congratulated by Mayor Jerry Cole. Seated in the truck is Jeremy Lehner, District Mechanic.

In memory of our ROHM members who recently passed:

Lowell Bentley
July 26, 1948 - April 1, 2023

Evelyn "Evie" Foshaug
March 15, 1921- April 17, 2023

Rodney C. Harding
December 6, 1949 - June 7, 2023

Note: Just under \$3,000 of donations were made in Lowell's name to the ROHM building fund

Hallberg's 1964 Dodge Panel Delivery Truck Is Up and Running

By Mike Clark, photo by Duane Bernard



In May 2022 ROHM located (with the help of Rainier Mayor Jerry Cole) and purchased the Hallberg 1964 Dodge panel grocery delivery truck once used by Roland Curteman. Tim Vasey of Rainier has donated many hours of his time bringing the truck back to full running condition. There is hope that it may be ready to participate in this year's Rainier Days in the Park Parade. It was last seen in the 1997 parade driven by grand marshal Roland Curteman. The truck will also be added to ROHM permanent collection once a museum building is constructed.



The above image is of a naval warship on the Columbia River as seen passing Rainier, Oregon on its way to the Portland Rose Festival. Over the years since 1907 ships from the U.S. Navy, U.S. Coast Guard, and Royal Canadian Navy have made an annual courtesy visit to the City of Roses to help in their festivities. It has always been a treat to see this annual migration of ships as they passed Rainier. From a postcard in the Mike Clark collection postmarked July 1919.

NEW MEMBERS SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER

(through to June 27, 2023)

We have 258 memberships* now.

- Steve & Joyce Berry
- Christine Gray
- Larry McCallister
- Jessi Nelson
- Janet Sedgely

HONORARY MEMBERS

- Columbia County Museum Association
- Betsy Johnson
- Steve and Jan Oliva
- Vernonia Pioneer Museum Association

LIFETIME MEMBERS

- Mike Avent
- Greg Beck

- Lawrence (Buzz) & Alice Beck
- Alfred S. Berg
- Harold & Elaine Davis
- Jefferson Davis
- Carol Girt
- William & Mary Harrison
- Rosalie Herstrom
- Robert & Dorothy Massey
- Russ & Jan Moon
- Sloan & Jennifer Nelson
- Paul & Judy Nys
- Mark & Sue Pitra
- Rainier Masonic Lodge #24
- Bill & Lydia Stennick
- Dale Strom
- Teevin Bros.
- Pat Valpiani
- K.C. & Marilyn Van Natta
- Robert & Martha Van Natta

* Memberships can be an individual member, a couple, or a family. All paid and honorary members will receive our newsletter.

Contact information: ROHM President Kay Heflin: kay-lynn2@hotmail.com or 360-751-7039.

This issue was produced by ROHM President Kay Heflin, Newsletter Editor Mike Clark, and Assistant Editor and Proofreader Martha Van Natta. Uncredited photos were contributed by interested parties.

Calendar of Events 2023

July 7-9	Rainier Days in the Park , The museum will have a booth at the west end of A Street. Be sure to stop by and visit us. Come by our booth for the Meet and Greet and visit with the Rainier Daze parade Grant Marshal, Delbert Larson. We will have a raffle basket and museum items for sale.
July 30	Rainier All-Class Alumni Picnic at Hudson-Parker Park running from noon to four. Bring your favorite picnic food for the buffet and some lawn chairs. Free coffee and water and tableware will be provided. Come visit with your old classmates. The winner of our raffle basket will be announced. The entrance fees into the park will be paid by the museum but we would appreciate a donation at the sign-in table.
September 16 Noon to 4:00 PM City Hall 3 rd Flr.	Logging Event. Jay Critchley will present his one-hour documentary about wigwam burners and the logging industry, “Fireflies in the Night: The Great Wigwam Burner.” Shown in the City Chamber Room, 2 nd floor, at 1:00 PM.
November 4	Rainier Senior Center Holiday Bazaar at the Rainier Senior Center. 9 to 3. The museum will have a table with baked goodies for sale and a raffle basket.
November 11	Veterans Day Celebration to honor local veterans at the museum from noon to four. We will have over 100 pictures of local veterans on display.