

Chop-House Confidential

The evolution of fine dining in Renton

By: Tom Monahan, *Gourmand Extraordinaire (Eating Machine)*

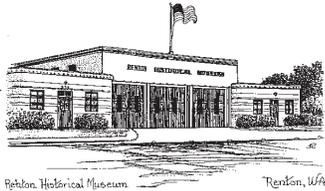
If you drive down almost any street in downtown Renton today, you will observe restaurants featuring cuisine from nearly every part of the globe, with interior decorations to match each one's theme. If you were under the impression that this was a new phenomenon, only beginning with our most recent wave of immigration, you would be wrong. Renton has a long history of our citizens expressing themselves through the culinary arts, many of which are featured in our current exhibit, "Sustaining a City". This article gives an historical overview of some of the more interesting dining establishments that Renton has been home to in the past.

Appetizers

When Renton first began to switch from a bustling mining camp to an authentic town, a long tradition of eating establishments was begun. The driving force behind the need for these businesses was the significant population of single men who didn't have the time or inclination to cook for themselves after a long day at work. Added to this was the growing numbers of women with culinary skills who wanted to bring in some extra income. The first restaurants in Renton that we have a record of were of the boarding house variety, and catered to the workmen in the new local industries, coal mining and brick factory employees. For a reasonable price, these working men could get a hot, home-cooked meal in an environment that which straddled the line between a private home and a hotel.



Above: An early image of the Melrose kitchen staff circa 1910. (#1981.106.1550)



Renton Historical Quarterly

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Hours:

Tuesday - Saturday 10:00am - 4:00pm

**Admission: \$3 for adults
\$1 for children**

**Always free to members and to the
general public on the first Wednesday
and third Saturday of the month.**

**Board Meetings: Please call the museum
for time and location.**



President's Message

By Laura Clawson, President

This has been a very busy summer. We recruited six new Trustees (more about that later) who were accepted by the membership at the Annual Meeting in June. The Board's Second Annual Benefit Dinner Auction was held a week later. Gyroscope kicked off the Museum Master Plan with a series of meetings July 9th and 10th. Renton River Days was later that month, always a huge effort by staff and Trustees. I held a new trustee orientation on July 28th. In August the Annex Building got a new coat of paint. Whoever said things slow down in the summer was not on the Renton Historical Society Board.



Our new Board members well deserve an introduction and warm welcome.

Phyllis Hunt, our new Treasurer, has been involved with Renton Historical Society for many years and has extensive accounting experience.

Betty Childers, a familiar name to many of you, works for the Renton School District and will bring her education background to the Board.

Vicki Jo Utterstrom, another familiar name, comes from two Renton pioneer families and has a strong interest in preserving and documenting Renton history.

The next three Trustees are new to Renton and want to become more involved in our community.

Barbara Whitehurst is the Major Gifts and Planned Giving Manager for Hopelink. She is skilled at fundraising and knowledgeable about non-profits.

Lay Chan is a Procurement Agent for The Boeing Co. and is enthusiastic about finance, budget, and the Master Plan.

Michael Jacobs served on the West Orange (NJ) Historic Preservation Commission before moving to Renton. He is a public relations writer.

As I stated last time, our goal is to mirror Renton's diversity and to attract skills and influence needed for Board activities. The Board of Trustees is fortunate indeed to have the variety of skills and backgrounds these dedicated people bring to positions of leadership in the Renton Historical Society.

Renton Museum Report

By Elizabeth P. Stewart

It's been a very eventful summer, starting with our Smithsonian exhibit, *Key Ingredients*, and closing with the kick-off of our Museum Master Plan. In



between we put the finishing touches on the Museum's Annex building and participated in Renton River Days. All together these efforts have resulted in one of our biggest summers ever in terms of visitor numbers. We're excited about the idea that people who have literally driven past the building hundreds of times are finally stopping in and finding out we have something to offer them!

The meetings to launch our Master Plan started us thinking about what the role of a museum really is in a community. In these budget-cutting times many museums are thinking about this question. As individuals, foundations, and governments who support museums re-prioritize their commitments, museums need to think about whether they have gone the extra mile to make themselves central to their communities. One of the most exciting suggestions that came up in our Master Plan meetings was that museums can be cultural leaders, serving as organizing spaces for people interested in connecting with others through heritage, arts, and other forms of culture. Museums can help nurture that spark of creativity and connectedness that makes innovation possible, without losing sight of their own missions.

Studies have demonstrated over and over again that communities committed to heritage and culture benefit from better economic development, stronger tourism, and more civic engagement. The Renton History Museum is the single heritage component of a constellation of cultural organizations in our city that include Evergreen City Ballet, Valley Community Players, Renton Civic Theater, Carco Theatre, the Renton Community Band, Renton Allied Arts, the annual teen musical, and individuals and businesses too numerous to list. We all create so much energy and goodwill with so little—imagine Renton River Days without the art market, for example, or imagine doing your family genealogy without the Renton History Museum!

When I visited Kodiak, Alaska this spring I was delighted to find that their community of 13,500 citizens supports five museums. Renton has one, which means we have an even bigger task to support the heritage needs of our city of 80,000+. The Master Plan will help us be a better partner and leader among cultural organizations. We aspire to keep your support and win over more people as we figure out how to be better in the future.

Liz Stewart

On-line Communities

The Renton History Museum is continuing to experiment with social networking tools like Twitter and Facebook to build community support and interest in the virtual world for what we do in the real world.

Recently geocachers Tobias and Petronella asked whether they could place a "cache" somewhere on Museum grounds, identify it on the website that geocachers use, and let the searchers find us. (Geocaching is a sort of high-tech scavenger hunt using GPS devices.) We said "sure," and in three weeks, 17 families have tracked us down!

Folks involved with our Master Plan process just started using an on-line tool called "wiggio" to hold group discussions and share files, photos, and web sites.

All these on-line communities help us expand our reach with minimal cost. If you'd like to join any of our groups, please visit our website or for more information email info@rentonhistory.org



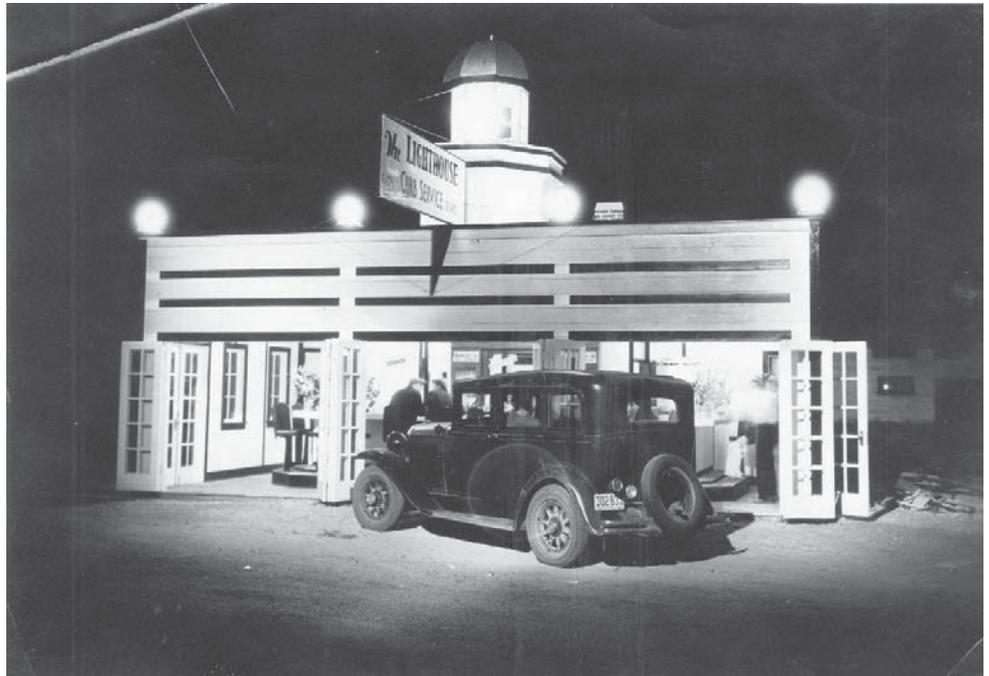
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At the turn of the 20th century, the population had gotten large enough so that stand-alone restaurants began to open. These establishments went by a number of slang terms such as “chop-houses” or “hash-houses.” As the nicknames would tend to imply, meat and potatoes were the commonly found dishes on the menu. The Melrose, which has managed to remain open almost continuously since its original start in 1901, is a good example. When it was first established by an English immigrant named Ben Atkinson, the Melrose was a combination Café, Hotel, and Saloon. Atkinson, who had made his fortune during the Yukon Gold Rush, saw the working class population of Renton steadily growing, and recognized a great business opportunity. Before long, the Melrose was doing steady business providing for the most important needs of the local workforce; food and drink, recreation and a place to bed down when the money was spent and the last morsels were eaten.¹

Other notable restaurants first opened during this early period, including The Eagle Café, owned by George and Catherine Dawes on the north side of Third and Main Streets, and The Third Rail Restaurant, operated by Len Cook, on Main Street near Walla Walla Avenue.² What made these establishments unique is that for the first time in the city’s history, the focus switched from providing a place for working-class men, to a family dining environment focusing on the total dining experience. Besides changes in the menu, this meant making restaurants look more appealing, from the outer façade to the inner décor. Rugged wood floors gave way to carpet, and bare walls were painted and decorated to attract a more sophisticated type of diner.

The Main Course

This new attempt to appeal to a more diverse set of diners manifested itself in some interesting building designs. The Lighthouse Drive-in Restaurant, on Third Street, is a prime example of this new architectural philosophy. The outer façade was made to look like a Lighthouse, complete with tower. The signs across the marquee were illuminated with bright neon, advertising tasty treats like hamburgers and soft-serve ice cream. The restaurant’s menu was emblazoned with the motto, “Where cooking is an art, and service a pleasure.”³ Along with the nautical theme, The Lighthouse was one of the earliest examples of new technology being a driving force for change in design. With more people owning cars and wanting meals on the go, the idea of a drive-in restaurant was born.



Above: The Lighthouse Drive-in Restaurant was an early example of architecture designed to complement a restaurant’s atmosphere. (#2003.059.6479)

Buildings like the Lighthouse, and the Triple 'XXX' Barrel Drive-in, which had an enormous root beer barrel growing out of the roof, are just two of the forerunners to today's fast food restaurants that line the streets of Renton. This middle period in the development of Renton's public dining culture was marked by the change from the public wanting a fancy, sit-down dining experience, to the public dealing with the increasing pace of modern life, and valuing convenience in their food service choices. Being able to drive up to an establishment like the Triple 'XXX' Barrel Drive-in and get a good meal, without needing to make reservations or dress up in fancy clothes, was a valuable service for people whose schedules were becoming more and more complicated every day.

But the style of architecture and advertising were not the only things changing during this period. The type of food being consumed in Renton's restaurants was undergoing another change as well. With the advent of fine dining had come a wider variety of dishes made more for their flavor and appearance than to simply satisfy a big appetite. As the new culture of convenience began to take hold, the menus of Renton's restaurants changed once again, this time to include popular items like hamburgers, hot dogs, and pizza by the slice, which mixed tasty flavors with convenience and portability.

A new twist was put on the idea of dining "portability" with the creation of the Spirit of Washington Dinner Train in the summer of 1993. The fine dining experience expanded outside of the city limits, as passengers boarded at the refurbished Burnett Station on Burnett Avenue, and enjoyed a sumptuous lunch or dinner menu on their way to the Columbia Winery in Woodinville.⁴ Diners got to experience a tasteful sit-down meal reminiscent of a chic restaurant, and choose items from a fine menu which often included such favorites as tender seasoned steak, and grilled chicken with mixed vegetables. Adding to the classy menu was the unique experience of watching the scenery pass by at a leisurely 25 miles per hour, allowing the passengers to enjoy the region's natural beauty while they ate. The trip was capped off with the winery visit, where locally made wines could be sampled before the return trip.



Above: The XXX Barrel Drive-in was a response to the growing number of automobiles in Renton. (#2001.056.5658)

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Coffee and Dessert

Renton today carries on the tradition of mixing environment with food to create a unique dining experience. The Chamber of Commerce alone lists 33 full-service restaurants, and those are just the ones that are Chamber members. Our city now has dining experiences for every taste, from fast-food served from a drive-through window, to classy restaurants where a man would feel under-dressed without a neck tie. We even have cafeteria-style dining featured in many of our larger supermarkets, taking the “convenience” concept to a new level.

As the ethnic background of the population of Renton has changed in recent years, so has the variety of foods being offered in local restaurants. Many immigrants to our city have found that offering a little home-cooked meal to their fellow expatriates as well as sharing their traditional recipes with Renton natives, is a great way to assimilate into our culture through everyone’s favorite tool of international diplomacy—food. They have discovered that tasty food transcends barriers like language, religion, and skin color, in a way that few other means of human interaction can.

Renton now boasts dining establishments featuring the cuisine of such far off lands as Vietnam, India, Lebanon, Italy, Mexico, Guatemala, and Thailand, just to name a few. Even regional tastes from within the United States can be satiated here. There are places which feature food from Hawaiian and Cajun culture, a variety of submarine style sandwiches from the Eastern Seaboard, and all-American comfort foods like pot roast and mashed potatoes which are common across many states.

No one can say for certain what the public dining experience in Renton will be like 100 years from now. If past trends are any indicator, it will probably be quite a bit different than it is today. One thing is for sure, as long as the city of Renton exists, there will be people standing by with innovative ideas and delicious recipes, waiting to show us new ways to quiet our rumbling stomachs.



Above: A 1993 photo showing Armondo’s Italian Restaurant, one of the many ethnically diverse eateries common in Renton today. (#99.006.6165)

¹ *The Tacoma News Tribune*, April 12, 2002, p.g.3.

² *Renton Record Chronicle*, July 29, 1959, p.g.1.

³ Menu, Renton Museum Collection ca.1947, (Renton History Museum Collection, # 1990.024.001) circa 1947.

⁴ “Welcome Aboard” pamphlet for the Spirit of Washington Dinner train found in clipping file.

Volunteer Report

By Dorota Rahn, Volunteer and Education Coordinator

Dear Museum members and volunteers,

On July 8, we opened our annual exhibit by students of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at the Renton Technical College. It was titled Food Unites Us, to go along with the year of food-related programs and exhibits launched by Key Ingredients. Students and ESL instructors came up with innovative display ideas.



The ESL students and their instructors—Marcia Arthur, Nahid Eng, Liz Falconer, and Sandy Stevens-Theizen—put an incredible amount of work into preparation of this exhibit. We appreciate them for sharing the traditions of their home countries and details from their new lives here in Renton and South King County. Thank you for giving us the Renton community an opportunity to discover the diversity of cultures participating in the life of our city and American society in general.

And last but not least big thanks to Jenna Pollock, RTC's Curriculum and Technology Specialist, who coordinated the whole process, organized boards to display students' work, and personally arranged the exhibit. Special thanks also to Don Bressler, then president of the Renton Technical College, and John Chadwick, the Dean of Basic Studies, for supporting the project.

Renton River Days

The museum participated in Renton River Days on July 22, and July 24 through 26. At our booth we offered different hands-on activities with the goal of teaching children of all ages about the culture of the Coast Salish, Puget Sound's Native Americans. The most popular activity was making a Coast Salish hat, which proved very useful in hot weather. A new activity this year was making models of Coast Salish river canoes. Kids had an opportunity to learn as they made paper canoes about the differences between river water canoes and salt water canoes designed for the Pacific Ocean.



Volunteers helped children with hands-on projects and talked to adults about the museum's exhibits, programs, and other activities. This summer we had a group of young volunteers who decided to help us during their vacation from school—Hanna Stump, Maylee Lim, Vineeth Omkaram, Natalie Rahn, and Adam Heim. Some of them not only helped children at the museum booth but prepared hat and vest forms in advance.

Our long-time volunteers Nancy Fairman, Shirley Phinney, Rachel and Alice Vdolek, Vivian Williams, Wil Samson, and Cindy Ensley were supported by an unprecedented number of board members, including Robin Baches, Betty Childers and her husband Steve Denison, Sandra Meyer, Kristie Walker with her baby daughter Annie, Laura Clawson and her granddaughter Laila Vafaezadeh, Lay Chan, and Phyllis Hunt. We were especially impressed with the mother/daughter and grandmother/granddaughter teams who turned up.

Museum staff and volunteers served 1092 people at the booth and the Museum during Renton River Days week. Thanks to everybody who spent endless hours in the heat and made sure that the museum and the Historical Society were appreciated by the community during Renton River Days.

From the Collections Department...

By: Sarah Iles, Collection Manager

Turning the Lights On: Behind the Scenes in Collections

Generally speaking, museums are able to exhibit less than 5% of their collection at any given time. This means 95% of their collection is in storage. Collection care and storage are two issues frequently kept out of the public sphere. This makes them no less important, however, especially when you consider how much of a collection must be permanently housed behind-the-scenes. Without proper collection care and storage, there would be no collection.



Just over one year ago, the Renton Historical Society purchased a new off-site storage building to house a substantial portion of our collection. Major renovations, partially funded by a generous Heritage Facilities grant from 4Culture, are now complete, with only cosmetic finishing work remaining. The new building, the Annex, provides a much needed upgrade for the Museum's collection care and storage situation.

The new building allows for several upgrades:

- heightened security
- a roof and ceiling free of water leakage
- a pest-free environment
- temperature controls
- more storage space
- collection work space

Acquiring and renovating the Annex was only half the battle. The daunting task of moving the collection remains. Collection moves are tricky projects. Almost all of the objects to be moved are fragile and all are irreplaceable. Extra care must be taken during the padding and packing process to ensure the objects will tolerate the bumping and jostling inevitable with a move. Maintaining intellectual control over the collection during a move is also a full-time job. All of the objects in question were inventoried during the summer of 2007, so we have a good handle on what we are dealing with. Endless labels and lists will be vital to keeping track of what goes where during the move.

During the planning process, I consulted with area collection managers who recently completed collection moves. When I asked one collection manager if he had any sage advice to impart, he replied, "Don't move!" He was only half-serious, of course, but his response indicates just how complicated and involved collection moves can be.

The collection move is tentatively scheduled for October. Thanks to a Collections Care grant from 4Culture, professional movers will be employed to ensure the larger items are safely transported to their new home. All the shelving, boxes, and smaller items will be moved by staff and volunteers.

If you are interested in volunteering to help move the collection, please contact Sarah Iles at siles@rentonwa.gov.



Overcrowded shelves at the Museum's current off-site storage

Fall 2009 Speaker Series

It's our privilege to offer our members, volunteers, and the Renton community with high-quality presentations on different topics every year. Even in this difficult economic time the museum found resources to fund our speaker program in this fall, because we believe it is important for families to have access to these opportunities for fun and learning. Just a reminder of the scheduled events:

September

Commemoration of September 11th by our guest speaker Prof. Faizi Ghodsi on Tuesday, September 8th at 5:00 p.m.

October

Mixed Beans Soup by Karol Brown, on Saturday, October 3rd at 11:00 a.m.

Trial by Fork: Formal Victorian Dining Demystified by Tames Alan on Tuesday, October 13th at 5:00 p.m.

Whispers in the Graveyard by Naomi and Bea Baltuck on Saturday, October 31st at 11:00 a.m. Come in costume for our Halloween program!

November

Wisdom, Weaving, Songs, and Legends by Harvest Moon on Tuesday, November 10th at 5:00 p.m.

December

The Tales of Hans Christian Andersen by Allan Hirsch on Saturday, December 12th at 11:00 a.m.

Sons of Italy Donates \$2500

The Renton Chapter of Sons of Italy made a generous donation to the Renton Historical Society in June of \$2500 for the purchase of temporary exhibit walls. The Museum has long needed sturdy display walls to allow us to create changing exhibits in our gallery space, and the Sons of Italy came forward to meet that need. Although the chapter has made the difficult decision to merge with the Burien chapter, the Museum hopes to do more to document the history of the organization here in Renton. Grazie, Sons of Italy!



Above: Liz Stewart, Rich Riato and Leslie Betlach

New Benefactor Memberships

Bill Lotto

New Memberships

Steven Denison & Betty Childers
Janet & Gerry Bertagni
Craig Preston & Karen Delaurenti
Mark & Barbara Whitehurst
Patty Yothers

General Contributions

Joyce Lindstrom
John & Katherine Connell

General Contributions \$100 & Over

Richard Wagner & Andee Jorgensen
Employees of Kenworth AYD Club

Congratulations to Pearl Jacobson

Recognized as Soroptimist Woman of the Year by Soroptimist International of Renton. Pearl donated her cash award to the Renton Historical Society.

Join the Renton Historical Society Today!

Name: _____
Membership Level: _____
Business Name: _____
Address: _____
City:State: _____ Zip: _____ + 4 (_____)

Please make checks payable to the Renton Historical Society.

VISA/MASTERCARD # _____ Ex.Date: _____

Your Signature: _____

- Please share your e-mail address with us: _____
- Please send me a volunteer application form. (32/1)

Mail To: Membership Secretary, Renton Historical Society
235 Mill Avenue South, Renton, Washington 98057-2133

Please Choose Membership Category & Any Donation You Wish To Make:

- Student/Teacher Individual (\$12) _____
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 - Family (\$30) _____
 - Patron Benefactor (\$100) _____
 - Business (\$100) _____
 - Corporate (\$100) _____
 - Life (\$500) *One Time Only* (partially tax deductible) _____
 - General Fund Donation _____
 - Endowment Fund Donation _____
- In Memory of: _____

Total enclosed: _____



denotes former Society Life Member

Obituaries Collected

denotes former Society member



**Memorials
of \$100 or more**

Marjorie Lotto
*Cecilia, Richard & Louise Major
Gordon & Carole Meek
James & Marilyn Cantrell*

May

Tina Ball

Gayl Ann Bertagni

Stephen C. Brodie

John Garbarino

Eileen Griffith 

Albert R. Hawkins

Bruce L. Hougardy

C. Floyd Hughes

Lois Jean Jackson

Margaret (Peggy) Mattaini

Brian S. Peterson

June

John W. Butler 

Karen (Lorenz) Castagno

Max E. Fisk

Norma (Bakko) Knott

Lorraine Kosny

A. L. (Larry) Lackie, DDS 

Marjorie Beaman Lotto

Angela Malmassari

Mary Soderlund

Zelima Gigli Vidmar 

July-Aug. 15

Ricardo Aguirre

Geraldine Church 

Susie Fischer

Edna Gregerson Johnson-Splaine

Lora Henry

James Koshak

Linda Leathley

Butch Rankin

Isaiah Reynolds

Robert C. Steger

Audrey Weeks Storey Wallington

Rentonians Remembered

Gayl Bertagni

*Louise Bertozzi; Gloria Duffey;
Louise George; Florence Delaurenti;
Bob Aliment; Don & Carmel Camerini;
Joe & Loretta Starkovich; Larry & Jeannie Crook;
Jim & Margie Marston; Rachel Thomas; Jean Tonda;
Wendell & Cleo Forgaard*

Frances G. Biggs

Carrie & Greg Bergquist

Florence Galiano Bull

*Florence Delaurenti; Louise George;
Vern & Phyllis Stenson*

Virginia Shook Busato

Hazelle DuBois

Tim Chinn

Hazelle DuBois

Charles B. DuBois

Hazelle DuBois

Elizabeth Swales DuBois

Hazelle DuBois

Kathryn Gilligan

Al & Shirley Armstrong

Lora Henry

Fran Klepach

C. Floyd Hughes

*Beth & Mike Potošnik; Betty Sipila;
Richard Lucotch; Bob Aliment;
Allen & Wayne Armstrong; Wendell & Cleo Forgaard*

Thomas Kerr

LoRayne Kerr

Loretta Corrine Lucotch

June & Homer Dolan; Jim & Bev Lunde

Charles Lundberg

Donna Furman

Angela Zanette Malmassari

Wendell & Cleo Forgaard

Daisy Beil Morris

Maxine Shepard

Jack G. Olsen

Bob Aliment & Joan Cain; Annie White

Ellen Klepach Sandbo

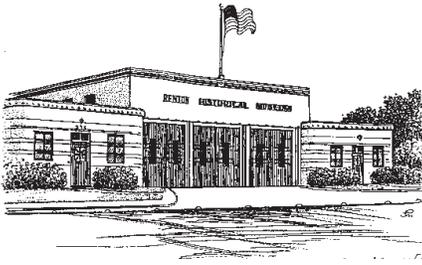
*Harriet Budinich; Robert & Gilda Youngquist;
Marilyn Kienke; John & Carolyn Henderson*

Edna Johnson Splaine

Peter & Hazel Newing

Zelima Vidmar

Mario & Victor Tonda; Bob & Roberta Logue



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Renton, WA 98057

In Hindsight...



Above: Halloween Dance at Dimmit Jr. High School in 1961. (#2003.038.6421)