

“I must report that the good guys were successful”
by Junius Rochester

AN INFORMAL MEMOIR - Life as President of the Pacific Northwest Historians Guild, 1993-1994. Rambles, the March History Conference, and speakers at general membership meetings were, and still are, the core of Guild activities. However, in the early 1990s I added a personal whim or ornament.

Because I am an unreconstructed bibliophile, I often referred members to books about our region - and some far beyond. For amusement, here are samples from my "President's Corner" column: David McCullough's history of *Harry Truman*; *The Killer Angels*, by Michael Shaara; and closer to home, H. Lark Hall's biography entitled *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art*. (We should occasionally be reminded that Parrington's Pulitzer Prize work, *Main Currents in American Thought*, might be the most readable and important local book produced in our time.) I also noted details about Lucille McDonald's *Swan Among the Indians*, and William L. Shirer's last book, a real gem, *Love and Hatred: The Stormy Marriage of Leo and Sonya Tolstoy*.

In the realm of matters at hand, the Guild actively participated in an effort to preserve historical offices such as the Seattle City Archives. Today, archivist Scott Cline presides over a mature city office that will prove invaluable to future historians. We also joined in a kind of partnership with the Washington State Historical Society to co-sponsor conferences and provided our membership list to the Tacoma-based organization.

The board's decision to forego our annual March Conference and instead co-sponsor a meeting in Seattle of the National Council on Public History was a large step. Members had to brace themselves for the role of second banana and pay a higher registration fee. The upside, however, was the sharing of conference income, which indeed markedly boosted the Guild's treasury in 1996.

James P. Ronda, eminent historian and Lewis & Clark expert from the University of Tulsa, made an informal presentation. I have benefited from Jim Ronda's excellent work in my talks about the Corps of Discovery, especially his classic *Lewis & Clark Among the Indians*. Local gadfly and travelling historian Ruth Kirk addressed our annual dinner, as did Walt Crowley, who is today's force behind www.historylink.org. Professor Quintard Taylor, author of books and articles about the African American experience, addressed another annual banquet.

Exposure to offbeat facets of our local history occurred with the auditioning of a documentary entitled *The Miracle Strip*, a breezy history about Longacres Race Track. Such serendipitous Guild activity continued with a talk about local personalities involved in the Spanish Civil War's Abraham Lincoln Brigade; a

preview of a book about Washington state courthouses - some of them architectural marvels; and a discussion of communal societies which once flourished in our Pacific Northwest Eden. Another interesting talk was given about early radio broadcasting, followed by tidbits about George Villiers Calhoun, the first president of the Washington State Medical Association.

Memories of several Rambles remain clear. One was our visit to Vancouver, B.C. aboard the new Spanish Talgo train. We bedded at the quaint Buchan Hotel in the West End. Besides exploring Vancouver's outstanding museums and gardens, we gathered one evening on Denman Street to watch the police corner a cat burglar clinging to the ledge of a nearby apartment building. I must report that the good guys were successful. Another special ramble was to Whidbey Island and Port Townsend. Warm sunny weather, combined with the interesting patter of Bill Woodward's narration at local forts, brought out the best in everyone.

Similar to today, Guild membership in the mid-1990s hovered around 120. When we lost someone, another worthy stepped forward with dues in hand. Perhaps the Guild is fated to always be comprised of about 100 regional historians? If the bulk of those members are enthusiastic contributors to our rich Pacific Northwest legacy, the Guild may be the kind of organization that will survive.

My dusty Guild file yields a number of handsome brochures holding member names, backgrounds, and areas of expertise. Seeing those pocket-sized flyers reminded me that we might be overdue on producing another such brochure, one that could be provided to schools, libraries, historical societies, and history conferences?