

# RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

Summer  
June 2012

QUARTERLY

Volume 43  
Number 2

“A bird was calling and calling  
‘a-lu-ra, a-lu-ra’”

## THE ALURA BROWN CUTLER STORY

by Sarah Samson

The Klikitat, the ship  
captained by Roswell Cutler  
and often the floating home of  
Alura Brown Cutler.

In December 2011 the Museum received an amazing donation. Four descendents of Capt. Robert Wilcox Brown travelled to Renton to donate two of Alura Brown Cutler’s journals. Dating 1873-1878 and 1887-1898, the journals offer a firsthand glimpse into the life of the area in the late 1800s. Alura was the sixth daughter of Robert Brown, a whaler and rancher who travelled the world before he became one of the first white settlers in the Renton area. He settled in late 1870 on an existing ranch along the Cedar River where present-day Liberty Park is located. The following is the second of a two-part account of the Brown family.

FROM THE SANDWICH ISLANDS TO RENTON  
Leaving behind a string of misfortunes, Capt. Robert Wilcox Brown arrived in the Pacific Northwest and purchased the Daniel Pierce homestead, known as the Brook Farm. The Brook Farm was nestled on the northern bank of the Cedar River, very near the burgeoning town that would later become Renton. Robert immediately set about making the homestead suitable for his family. He had four young men working for him, at least two of whom sailed with him from the Sandwich Islands.<sup>1</sup>

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Board President.



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Collection Manager.



## DUWAMISH JOURNEY WITH JOHNNY MOSES

Johnny Moses, a Tulalip Native American, was raised in the remote Nuu-chah-nulth village of Ohlat on the west coast of Vancouver Island, B.C., Canada. He is part Duwamish and is a member of other tribes. He is fluent in eight native Northwest languages. Johnny is a visual artist, master storyteller, oral historian, traditional healer, and respected spiritual leader. The Renton History Museum is proud to present the very personal and rarely displayed drawings of Coast Salish Native American life by Johnny Moses.

From  
**JUNE**  
 12  
 To  
**AUGUST**  
 24

## CONGRATULATIONS TO CECELIA MAJOR

Cecelia Carey Major celebrated her 100th birthday in March. She has been a Life Member of the Renton Historical Society since 1986 and is a former volunteer for the museum. At the Renton High School Centennial in 2010, it was determined that she is the school's oldest living graduate. Cecelia was part of the graduating class of 55 students in 1930. During her senior year at RHS she was editor of the school newspaper, president of the Torch Honor Society,



and was voted "Popularity Princess."

## OUR NEW LOOK!

You will notice that our quarterly newsletter has a fresh new look. While we loved the old newsletter, we all agreed that it was time for a change to go along with our Museum Master Plan. Graphic designer Wil Samson worked with a small committee of Board members and staff to develop this slightly more contemporary format. Wil will also be taking over the regular design duties on a volunteer basis, for which we are very thankful. Susie Bressan has been our dedicated newsletter designer for many years,

and we thank her for putting up with late submissions, historic photos, and those crazy footnotes. We believe this format will make it easier for you to find the Museum news and information you are looking for. We hope you enjoy the new style. Next stop: e-newsletter!

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 &  
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# MUSEUM REPORT

by Elizabeth P. Stewart,  
Museum Director

History shows us that change is a constant of life; as much as we like to think back on the “good old days,” in truth they were usually very brief in duration. One exception to this has been our Administrative Assistant Daisy Ward. Daisy has been with the Museum for almost 17 years, and at 80 years old she has decided to retire.

Her retirement feels like the end of an era for the Renton History Museum. When Daisy first came as a secretary as part of an AARP training program, the Museum was run by volunteers. She had had secretarial training, but now she was re-entering the workforce smack in the middle of the computer age, and surrounded by people more passionate about doing research and caring for collections than keeping track of members or donations.

Daisy’s task then was to pull together the efforts of these dedicated volunteers—Stan and RoseMary Greene, Ethel Telban, Louis George, and others—and make them harmonize as a fully functioning museum. All these years later, Daisy is still the stable center of the turning wheel that is the Renton History Museum; while the rest of us are spinning round, she is keeping everything steady and smoothly functioning.

Daisy has adapted to two Directors and paid staff, a computerized collections database, and many new ideas about what a Museum should be and should do. Through all these changes, Daisy has been unfailingly cheerful, with a can-do spirit we all want to emulate. We have never heard her say “I can’t do that” or “that’s not the way we do things here.” She has been the face of the Museum for so many members and volunteers, remembering their names and family connections. And, although she’s too modest to admit it, she has become so expert at Renton history that she is a boon to every researcher.

Daisy has her own history, with joys and sorrows, that we hope she will share in an oral interview someday. A Montanan by birth, Daisy came to Renton shortly after WWII; she remembers when City Hall was on the present site of Community Center, and she recalls her first Renton home in wartime housing. She raised three beautiful daughters here—Ruth, Janice, and Nancy—and now has two sons-in-law, Ralph and Bill, and two grandsons, Nick and Brennan.

We will miss having Daisy with us at the Museum, but we will enjoy knowing that she’s spending time with her family, her friends, her church group, and her dog and cat, without worrying about us. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for your service, Daisy—everyone who has worked with you is richer for the experience.



Elizabeth P. Stewart  
—  
Director



Daisy & Louise George.



Daisy & her family.

## RENTON HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Wil Samson  
Graphic Design & Layout  
Daisy Ward  
Text Input & Copy Editor  
Karl Hurst  
City of Renton Print &  
Mail Services

## RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Sarah Samson  
Collection Manager  
Dorota Rahn  
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Coordinator  
Daisy Ward,  
Administrative Assistant  
Pearl Jacobson  
Volunteer Registrar

RENTON  
HISTORY MUSEUM  
235 MILL AVE. S  
RENTON, WA 98057

P (425) 255-2330  
F (425) 255-1570

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

ADMISSION:  
\$3 (Adult)  
\$1 (Child)



CULTURE

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Sandra Meyer, President

## UPCOMING EVENTS



### RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING

June 6  
6:00-8:00pm

Join members and prospective members for a barbecue get-together, short business meeting, and awards ceremony.



### RENTON RIVER DAYS

July 27-29

Visit us at our booth in Liberty Park for children's activities, and come to the Museum all week for free!



### 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BENEFIT DINNER & AUCTION

October 24  
5:30 - 9:00pm

Support Renton's past and promising future! Tickets are \$40 per person. See page 11 for more information.

This winter and spring the Historical Society and Museum have continued to collaborate on producing programs and activities, with the Board of the Historical Society focusing on raising the profile of the Museum in the community. The Society continues participating in community activities, most recently staffing a booth at the Renton Piazza Spring Festival and preparing for our Annual Members Meeting, the Farmers Market, Renton River Days, and neighborhood picnics. Master Plan briefings for community leaders are continuing and our first members' survey is about to be launched.

In addition, we've selected a recipient for the George and Annie Lewis Custer Award for Heritage Citizenship. We have also interviewed and selected new trustees to serve on the Board. Our prospective trustees are all Renton residents, have an interest in history and/or event planning, and bring other management skills to the Board. The Custer Award and the new trustees will be announced at the Annual Members Meeting on June 6. Please mark your calendar to join us!

As these changes take place we have trustees moving into new positions of leadership. Alexis Madison will be serving as both Membership and Endowment Committee Chair. Anne Melton recently started as the Museum Committee Chair. Also at the June Members Meeting we will be saying goodbye to outgoing trustees Lay Chan, Endowment Chair for the past two years, and Betty Childers, who served as our Fundraising/Events Committee Co-Chair. While we know trustees may choose to move on after their three-year term is completed, we hope they all remember their work on the Board with great satisfaction. We also hope they remain Museum supporters.

I will be stepping down as President of the Historical Society in June, and Theresa Clymer, Vice President of the Society for the past two years, has agreed to take on the Presidency. Andy Sparks, past Membership Committee Chair, has agreed to serve as our new Vice President. As for me, I intend on focusing my efforts toward moving our pre-capital campaign forward so that once we do solicit contributions, contributors will know without hesitation what we are doing and how we will be phasing the plan. Although we are moving forward with the Master Plan, there are important aspects waiting for adequate funds.

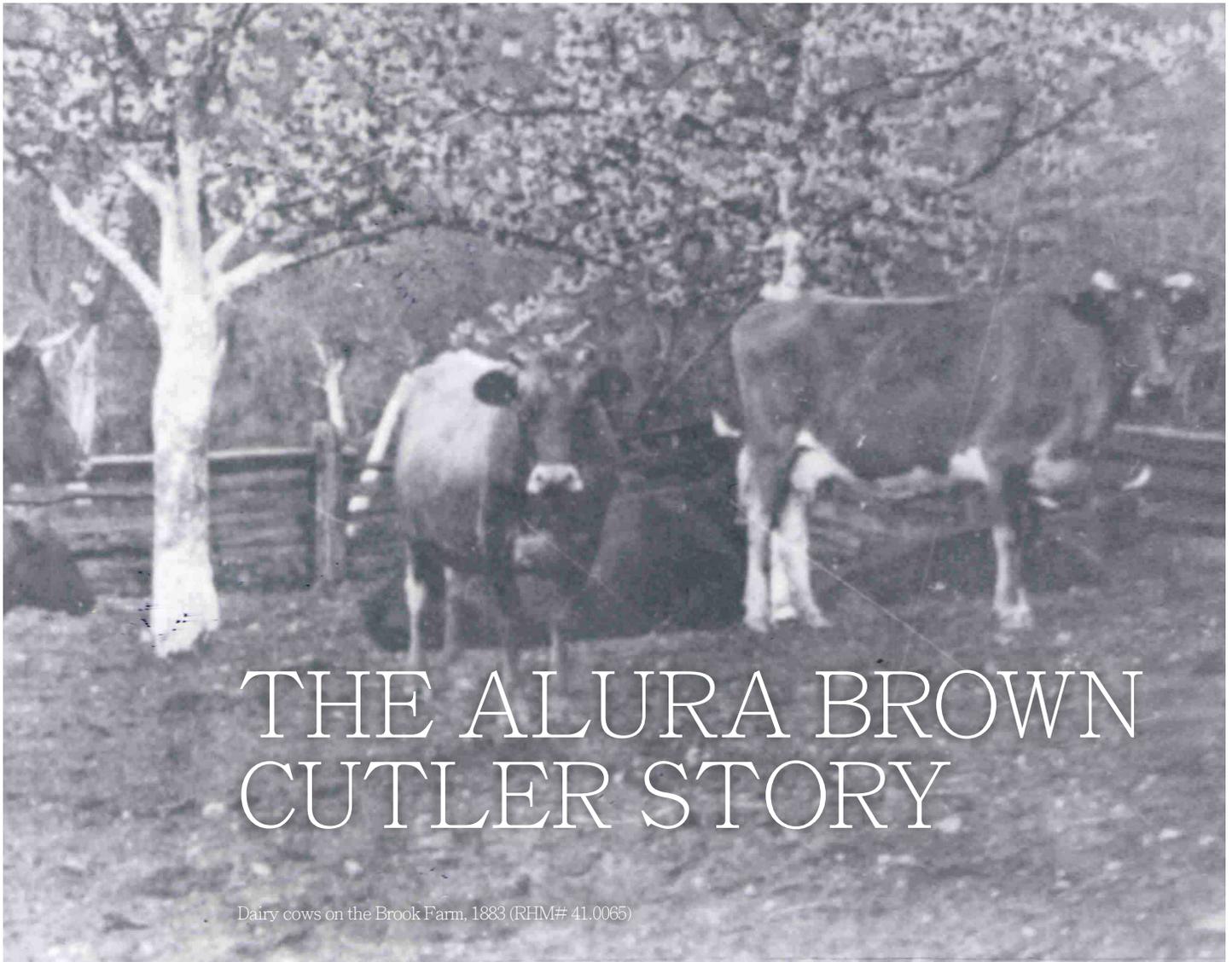
Thank you all for supporting the Museum and participating whenever you can. We all love this little gem and intend to make it more relevant to our ever increasing and diverse community.



Sandra Meyer  
—  
President



Historical Society VP Theresa Clymer talks to festival-goers at the Spring Festival in May.



# THE ALURA BROWN CUTLER STORY

Dairy cows on the Brook Farm, 1883 (RHM# 41.0065)

Continued from page 1

In late July Charlotte arrived with all of the children except the oldest two, Annie and Charlotte, who stayed behind with their husbands. The children quickly settled in and began attending school. There were so few people in the area at that time that only five families had children of school age. They all attended school together at the Christian Clymer homestead, sometimes crossing a Duwamish fishing weir over the Cedar River to get to school.<sup>2</sup>

## “EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD TODAY”

The sixth child of Robert and Charlotte was named Alura Eliza Brown. She began keeping a journal on her eighteenth birthday, just over two years after she came to live at Brook Farm. Alura’s name originated on her father’s side of the family. Her ancestors were in the first group of white colonists in Connecticut. When the first baby was born there, the mother heard a bird “calling ‘a-lu-ra, a-lu-ra’”; beginning a family tradition, the mother named her daughter “Alura.”<sup>3</sup> Alura lived at Brook Farm from 1871 until 1878. Her journal documents her and her family’s lives during this time period.

After the family’s arrival, Brook Farm grew to include several buildings, a herd of dairy cattle, an orchard, pigs, and chickens. Daughter Alura described looking down on the farm



Alura Eliza Brown, age 16, ca. 1871. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rice and Michael Rice.)



Beth Cutler, Roswell Cutler,  
and Ruth Cutler, ca 1898.  
(Photo courtesy of Ruth Rice  
and Michael Rice.)

from a nearby hill: “The white green-blinded house nestling among the fruit-laden orchard looked pleasant and home-like. I saw the lazy cattle sauntering over the pastures in search of the late grasses.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to farming, Robert, ever the entrepreneur, built a saw mill on the Cedar River. Sometime between 1871 and 1874, however, Robert’s bad luck found the family again and the Cedar River flooded and destroyed the mill. Robert continued farming, and by 1874 became convinced there were mineable coal deposits under his land. The Renton Coal Mine was already in operation on the hill above the farm (Renton Hill) and Robert prospected his own land relentlessly for three years, driving the family deep into debt. “Father is still prospecting. O, when will he give it up!” lamented Alura. “It is such an expense, and all for an uncertainty.” The prospecting only stopped when Robert’s brother, Theophilus Brown, came to town in 1877. Theophilus paid off Robert’s debts by making deals that included forcing the family to move out of the big house on the farm in order to rent it out.<sup>5</sup>

Alura accepted an offer to teach school in Maple Valley during the summer of 1887. She used a pony to ride the fifteen miles home on the weekends. During the week she stayed with the families of her students, often in smaller homes than she was used to. “I was rather surprised to find we all had to sleep in one



Roswell and Alura Cutler in their cabin aboard the *Klikitat*. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rice and Michael Rice.)

room... The man of the house ‘turned in’ while we ‘wimen [sic] folks’ went out or looked the ‘tother’ way.’<sup>6</sup> In August, Alura turned 22. She was still single and had been under pressure for some time to find a suitable husband. She rebelled against these expectations, writing in her journal, “Well, I am twenty-two. Think of it. All my sisters were married before that, that are married, and Edie will be. And here I am and not a beau. It is my own fault, I know, and am willing to let it be so.”<sup>7</sup>

#### “I WAS MEANT TO BE A SAILOR’S WIFE”

The following summer, Alura found herself on board the *Rainier* with her mother Charlotte and nephew Robert en route to the Sandwich Islands. Believing that a change in climate would aid Charlotte’s declining health, the little trio set out with only a week’s notice. The trip was Alura’s first journey home in seven years and she took to the sea again with great anticipation. “Oh, this grand old ocean. How I love it,” Alura wrote. “I was meant to be a sailor’s wife.”<sup>8</sup> They stayed the whole summer, visiting family and friends and staying mostly with Alura’s older sisters, Annie and Charlotte.

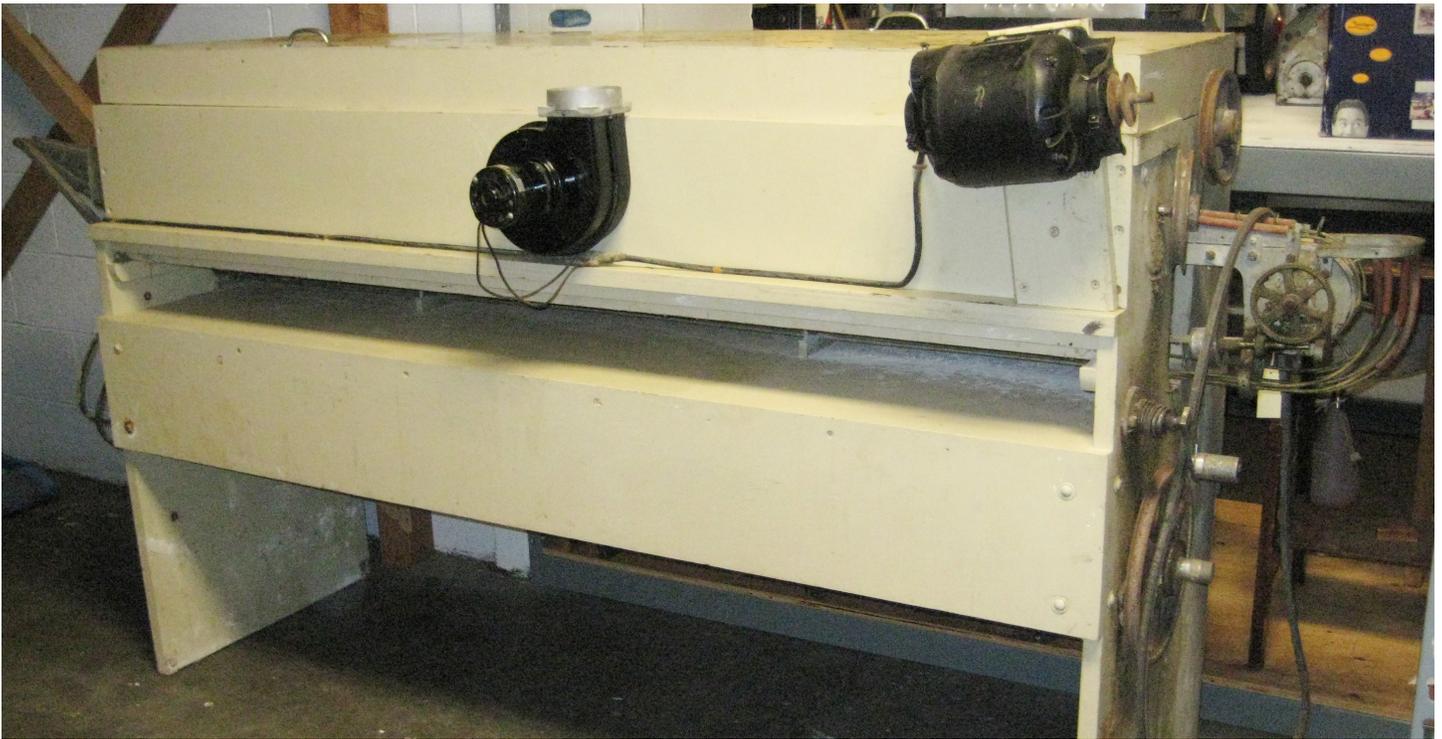
Leaving her mother behind, Alura and nephew Robert boarded the *Camden* to head back to Renton in September 1878. In her journal Alura mentions having conversations with

a “Mr. Cutler,” the first mate on the ship.<sup>9</sup> Her journal abruptly ends two entries later, leaving the course of her courtship a mystery. Alura’s granddaughter, Ruth Rice, recalls that in 1936 when Alura knew she was dying of cancer, she removed and burned the rest of the journal. Mrs. Rice surmised that those pages contained Alura’s feelings about Mr. Cutler and were too personal for others to read after her death.

Charlotte Brown returned to Renton and died on July 11, 1879. Alura and Roswell Cutler were married a few months later, on November 12, 1879, at Brook Farm. Roswell became a captain soon after and Alura alternated between sailing with him and staying around the Seattle area with family or in rentals. They had three children: Ruth, Gilbert (stillborn), and Alura Elizabeth (called Beth). Ruth and Beth always accompanied their mother when she accompanied Roswell onboard the *Klikitat* as it sailed to Hawaii, San Francisco, and back to Seattle.

Alura’s second journal picks up well into their marriage. She wrote in it much more sporadically than the first journal with sometimes more than a year between entries. Most of Alura’s journal entries during these years describe where she was, amusing things her daughters did, and the state of health of her various family members.

Continued on page 10



Magic Egg Cleaner, ca 1938. Large rotating cylinders covered with loops of abrasive paper are hidden beneath the lid. (RHM#2011.028.001)

# COLLECTION REPORT

by Sarah Samson,  
Collection Manager



Sarah Samson  
—  
Collection Manager

Almost one year ago, an obscure piece of agricultural history found a new home at the Renton History Museum. This large odd-looking contraption, the “Magic Egg Cleaner,” was invented and patented in Renton by the National Poultry Equipment Company in the mid-1930s. The machine features two large rotating cylinders that are covered with small loops of abrasive paper. The eggs ran through the machine on a conveyor belt and the abrasive paper buffed the dirt off the surface of the eggs.

Patent No. 2,018,967 notes that the Magic Egg Cleaner is “a machine which will clean eggs by abrasive action, without the use of any liquid, and without the application of force sufficient to break, check, or in any way injure the egg, and which will accomplish this end without attention on the part of an operator other than to position the eggs and to remove them when they are cleaned.” The patent records place the head office of the company at 615 Wells St. N. in Renton.

The National Poultry Equipment Company is still in existence and is currently based in Osage, Iowa. Their website states that brothers Clyde and Walter Powell designed and built



A close-up of the abrasive paper loops covering the rotating cylinders.

the machine. The patents, however, were awarded to a team of three men: John E. Powell (the brothers’ father), and father and son team Edward E. Miller and Vere C. Miller. Census records indicate that all the men besides Vere Miller had experience on farms, though he probably grew up on one. All three Powells had experience with mechanics and machinery.

After the invention of the Magic Egg Cleaner, a company salesman sold the Powell Brothers on the idea of using water to clean eggs. At the time, the use of water was not approved by the USDA as an egg cleaning method. The USDA later changed the rules and the Aquamagic Egg Cleaner became a popular seller for the company. Certain models of the Aquamagic also included candling and grading functions.

The Museum’s Magic Egg Cleaner was found in the basement of a farm near Renton by Big Haul, a junk removal company in Bellevue. They thought the machine was far too interesting to sell for scrap metal and, thankfully, they donated it to the Museum.



# MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

February 15 - May 15

Robert Bianco  
Betty Sipila

Joe Bridgeman  
Wendell & Cleo  
Forgaard

Conrad Brodie  
Robert & Margaret  
Wicks; Wendell &  
Cleo Forgaard

Craig R. Callen  
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Louise George,  
Gloria Duffey &  
Florence Delaurenti

Karen Irene Delaurenti  
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Gloria Duffey, &  
Florence Delaurenti

Kathleen McCann  
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Bruce Edmonds  
Ron & Sharon Clymer

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Patricia Sell &  
Joyce Peterson

Charles Goodwin  
Patricia Sell &  
Joyce Peterson;  
Judith Peters;  
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Daisy Goodwin  
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Richard O' Dell  
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Armand Pelletier  
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## MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF \$100 OR MORE

James A. Toman  
Olympe Babe Toman

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Ernie Tonda  
Mario Tonda

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Microsoft Matching Gift Program  
(matching volunteer hours of Steven Thomas)

## GENERAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Judith Peters  
Elaine Wells  
Sally Rochelle

## GENERAL CONTRIBUTIONS

\$100 AND OVER  
Sandra & Rex Meyer  
Norman & Carol Abrahamson

## NEW MEMBERSHIPS

Alex & Mindy Gillespie  
Kevin Poole & Bryce Miller  
Virginia Hartman  
Judith Peters

## IN-KIND DONATIONS

Pritchard Design  
Wil Samson Design



## CORRECTION OF DOBSON MEMORIAL

Listed in the February 1995 Quarterly:  
The memorial contribution made in 1995 by John W. Dobson was in memory of his youngest brother DAVID C. DOBSON and their parents THOMAS & GRACE C. DOBSON.

Occasionally, though, she wrote of historic events. She described the Great Seattle Fire, for example: “Seattle has gone through a dreadful fire and there are thousands without food or shelter or would be but for the timely help of her sister cities. Thursday last a fire broke out on front street [sic] and did not rest until it had burned every business house in Seattle... I never saw a grander sight than that fire at about 8 P.M. The streets were a sight with fleeing people with what household goods they could save and things from the stores and such. It was a sad sight and full of excitement.”<sup>10</sup>

Alura also makes note through the years of her father’s estrangement from the rest of the family. In late 1889 eighty-year-old Robert married the widow Margaret Crosby, his son Theophilus’ mother-in-law. Though their father had been a widower for ten years, Alura and her sisters did not approve of the union. By early 1891 Robert had separated from his new wife and was living on Whidbey Island.<sup>11</sup> Later that year the children collectively sued Robert after he attempted to sell all the Renton property without their consent.<sup>12</sup> They dropped the lawsuit a short time later but hard feelings remained. Robert died at his son Tom’s house in August 1894 and Alura’s sister Mary refused to allow their father to be buried in Seattle’s Lakeview Cemetery next to their mother. The rest of the children did not agree with Mary, but apparently had no choice but to bury their father by himself in Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Renton.<sup>13</sup>

Alura continued going to sea and taking care of her daughters. Sadness found their small family in January 1899 when oldest daughter Ruth died of typhoid fever at age 16 while Roswell was away at sea. Alura’s diary ends almost exactly a year before Ruth died and as far as we know she never again kept a journal. She continued sailing with her husband into the 1900s. Roswell died in Seattle in 1916 and Alura eventually

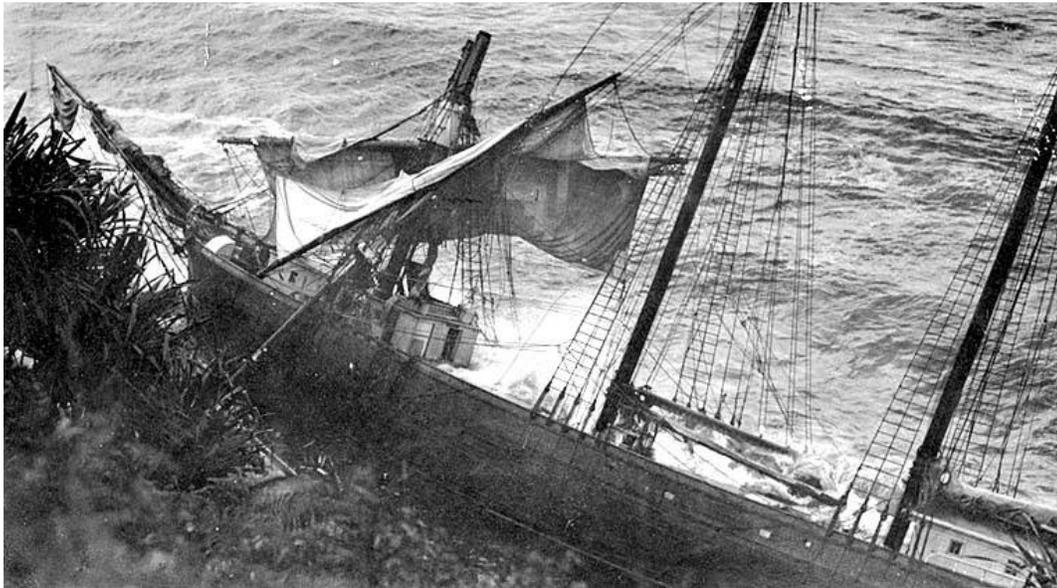
moved in with her daughter Beth in Utah where she resided until her death September 14, 1936.

#### POSTSCRIPT

The rich history of the Brown family is well documented, but it comes alive in the pages of Alura’s journals. Alura’s first person narrative about her family and her life in Renton is a treasure and the Renton History Museum is proud to be the caretaker. The author would like to thank Ruth Rice, Michael Rice, and Larry Miller for their donation and assistance in researching the Brown family.

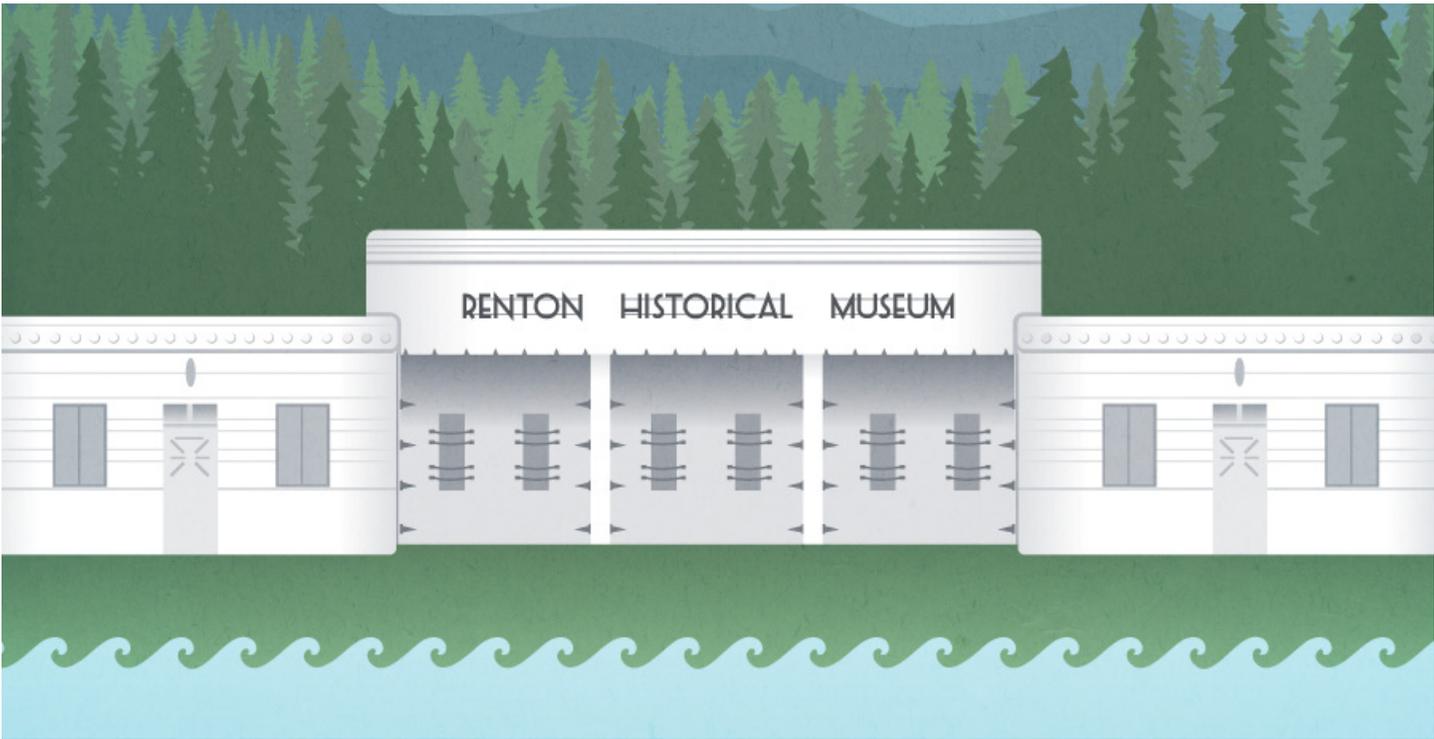
#### (ENDNOTES)

- 1 Washington Territorial Census, King County, 25 Jul 1871, 25.
- 2 Angie Burt Bowden, *Early Schools of Washington Territory*, (Seattle: Lowman and Hanford Company, 1935), 211.
- 3 Eunice A. Spencer, “The History of Captain Robert W. Brown Who came to Cedar River in 1870 From Hawaii,” unpublished article, 5 November 1961, 1.
- 4 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 1, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 2.
- 5 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 1, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 23.
- 6 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 1, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 18.
- 7 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 1, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 20.
- 8 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 1, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 26.
- 9 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 1, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 33.
- 10 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 2, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 25.
- 11 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 2, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 34.
- 12 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 2, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 34.
- 13 Transcript of Alura Brown’s journal Vol. 2, vertical file Captain Robert Brown, Renton History Museum, 43.



Wreck of the barkentine KLIKITAT, 1912. (Courtesy of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW31175.)

Roswell Cutler’s ship, KLIKITAT, wrecked off the coast of Hawaii in 1912. On November 9, the *KLIKITAT* was reported as being stranded at Honlii Point. It is unclear whether Roswell was still captain of the vessel when it wrecked. We know that he sailed at least until 1910 (as he is listed as a “sea kaptain” in the census of that year), but we do not know exactly when he retired. Roswell Cutler died in Seattle on December 28, 1916.



# 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BENEFIT DINNER AND SILENT AUCTION

Get your tickets now for the Annual Benefit Dinner and Silent Auction on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 at the Renton Senior Activity Center. The event will feature a silent auction, fantastic meal, entertainment, and will be hosted by an emcee. Please support the Renton History Museum by celebrating Renton's past and promising future! Tickets are \$40 per person or \$300 for a table of eight. Call the Museum at 425.255.2330 to reserve your space now!

On  
**OCTOBER**  
 24  
 At  
**5:30 PM**

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Please consider making a donation to the Renton Historical Society.

Your donations help us provide new exhibits and exciting programs!

Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to the Renton Historical Society.

Visa or MC: \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Renton Historical Society  
 235 Mill Avenue South  
 Renton, WA 98057

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 Fax: 425.255.1570  
 Email: estewart@rentonwa.gov  
 www.rentonhistorymuseum.org

RENTON HISTORY MUSEUM  
235 Mill Ave. S  
Renton, WA 98057



John Sedlacek Confectionery, summer 1909. Located on the north side of Walla Walla (now Houser) between Wells and Main. (RHM# 2006.043.002b)