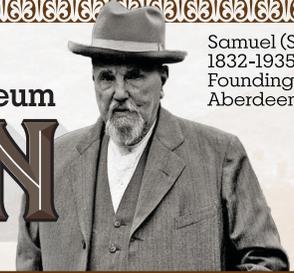


# BENN'S BULLETIN

Friends of the Aberdeen Museum



Samuel (Sam) Benn  
1832-1935  
Founding Father of  
Aberdeen, WA 98520

Spring Edition

AberdeenMuseumFriends.org

March 2024

## 100 Years! First in Washington MILLER JUNIOR HIGH



When Miller was created in 1924 Aberdeen was producing more lumber than anywhere in the world. Aberdeen was larger than Vancouver or Olympia. Aberdeen was heavily populated with immigrants hungry for the education that would bring their children the American dream.

In 1914 George B. Miller at the age of 29 was elected superintendent of the Aberdeen School District. (Learn more about him on page 4.) He saw the education need in Aberdeen with the growth of the community. He greatly expanded the grade school system and in the second semester, January 28, 1924, Miller Junior High became the first school of

its kind in the state. The school had 400 pupils in grade 7 through 9. Instead of one teacher these pre-“high schoolers” had several and lockers and P.E. and met students from all over town. In those days that meant in many cases the first time students from different cultures met. They came from families who often grouped together so the parents could speak their first language and share familiar traditions—Finnish, Italian, Scandinavians, German, Croatian, Polish....

Junior High by the 50's meant movies and popcorn in the lunch room, school dances and new classes like sociology, botany, algebra,

geography. These were concepts that were well beyond a grade school teacher who needed to cover all courses for their class.

### So what about the 100 year celebration? WOW!

The students at Miller Jr High showed that they are a well-oiled machine. They demonstrated to the community what commitment they have and the breadth of current education. The students made this a real learning experience for themselves and showed the city what they were capable of.

The students created radio PSA's and worked with the *World* newspaper reporter on articles. They made

*cont'd on p. 3*

**SPECIAL HISTORY 98520 ANNOUNCEMENT ON PAGE 3**

## Friends of the Aberdeen Museum 2023-2024 Board of Directors

**President**

Ruth Hamilton

**Vice President**

Patti Binski-Walden

**Secretary**

Vacant

(Nancy Cuyle, Acting)

**Treasurer**

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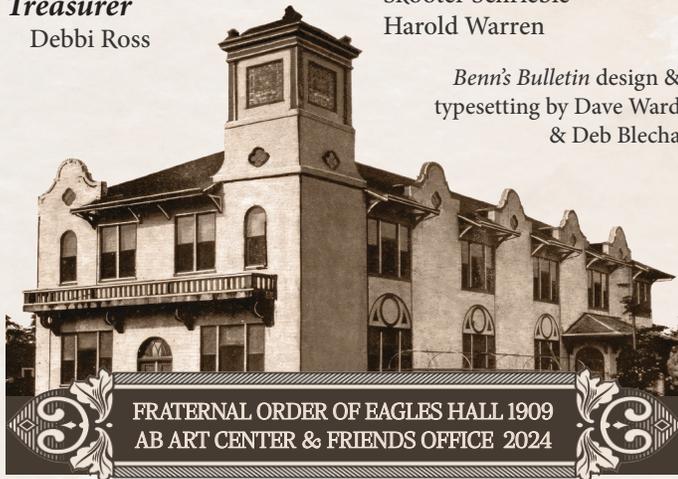
Vacant

**Trustees**

Skooter Schrieble

Harold Warren

*Benn's Bulletin* design &  
typesetting by Dave Ward  
& Deb Blecha



We are  
working hard  
to increase our  
hours to be open  
Thursday through  
Monday.

We are looking  
for a few more  
volunteers.

If you can donate  
a little time, give  
us a call or  
drop by.

**VISIT OUR OFFICE:**

Market & K St.  
(K St. Entrance)

Volunteers are in the office  
Thursday and Friday 1-4 pm  
and during Aberdeen First  
Fridays from 5-8 pm

**MAIL US:**

P.O. Box 722  
Aberdeen, WA 98520

**CALL US:**

(360) 533-1976

**EMAIL:**

friends98520@gmail.com

**WEBSITE:**

aberdeenmuseumfriends.org

**BENN'S BULLETIN:**

Quarterly pub released  
March; June; Sept.; Dec.

Archived past  
editions are  
found on our  
website.



## SUPPORT FRIENDS OF THE ABERDEEN MUSEUM

Funds go toward preserving and celebrating history in our community

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**MEMBERSHIP:**

- Individual - \$25/yr.
- Family - \$50/yr.
- Business - \$100/yr.
- Senior - \$20/yr.
- Youth - \$5/yr.
- Sustaining Individual/Business - \$300/\$500/yr.

**Make checks payable to FRIENDS OF THE ABERDEEN MUSEUM.**

Mail to: P.O. Box 722, Aberdeen, WA 98520

I wish to remain anonymous. Do not use my name in any publication or display.

Memorial Donation For: \_\_\_\_\_

Send Acknowledgment to: \_\_\_\_\_

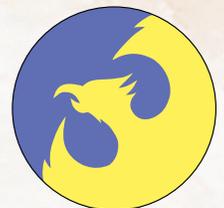
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Endowment Donation \$** \_\_\_\_\_ . Friends receive investment earnings only.

**VOLUNTEER:**

- I would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities.
- I am interested in the volunteer membership waiver program. I understand that I can earn my membership after 10 volunteer hours.

Rising From  
the Ashes Is  
What We Do!



# Introducing History98520

“HISTORY98520” will soon be appearing as the new “dynamic identity” of our nonprofit. It better speaks to the wider mission of our organization and the overall goals that the (existing) Aberdeen Friends of the Museum wishes to encompass.

Without a current museum, we are working to offer a wide variety of programs to continue to engage with both our community members and visitors alike. We have already launched a series of free public speaking events to educate and entertain on a wide variety of topics. We also rotate bi-monthly exhibits in our “micro-museum” located within the Friends of the Museum

office. Coming this Spring we will be re-launching the Historic Aberdeen Walking Tours, now operating under History98520. What else can you expect? Educational outreach with schools and more partnering with other area non-profits... ALL for the love of history!

You see, we are much more than just the folks you associate with the Museum and we want you to continue to grow your love of history by joining us on our journey as we “rise from the ashes!”

Does that mean that the Friends of the Museum is going away? Not at all! Being a key component of museum operations is at the heart

and soul of our group and going forward, we hope to partner with the city in the creation of an exciting and new Aberdeen Museum of History!

We have already begun to collect data through public outreach in helping to shape what the new museum will offer. We also continue to document and catalog the surviving artifacts from the devastating museum fire... rest assured, we will have a new museum that will make this community proud!

So look out for History98520 as we rebrand and reimagine our way into the future and shine new light on the past!

## Miller Junior High Centennial *cont'd from p. 1*

displays down the school's halls, each display focusing on a ten-year period in school history. The AVID class put together a wonderful slide show of Miller and her students through the years. The high school got involved to with video production and research. Their videographers patrolled the halls capturing the event and interviewing past school graduates. The choir, bands and orchestras put together special pieces.

The students created a time capsule so the future students will be able to look back too.

The celebration had significance

for the students. To quote a few:

“It made me appreciate the school to a whole new level” “Something I enjoyed was working with my classmates and getting to know them more.” “I learned that hard work pays off in the end” “I loved seeing people come and look at what we did. I saw people smile and I love that.”

And smile they did. The alums and parents who attended the event



The original Miller Junior High on I Street.  
(Jones Photo/Anderson & Middleton #12544\_1)

were often smiling as they saw photos of their old classmates and remembered the things that were important and even life changing for them back then.

# George Burdette Miller

George B. Miller was the son of a Michigan farmer whose grandparents were German immigrants. He loved history and had a strong interest in sociology and education. As a graduate of the University of Washington, he first came to Aberdeen High School in 1907 as history teacher. Only one year later he was promoted to AHS principal at age 23. His leadership was so strong that he was promoted again to superintendent of schools after only 6 years.

Under his leadership five new grade schools were built & A.J. West was doubled in size. Then the Junior High was added.

George Miller believed in the junior high movement that was spreading through the nation – but not yet Washington State. He felt strongly that young teens did not fit well in grade schools. They were ready to spread their educational wings. The junior high gave them that opportunity. The new school was sited next to Weatherwax High School. It included a state-of-the-art com-



George B. Miller

munity auditorium that could be used by both schools as well as the community in general. It served Aberdeen well for many years.

Then he went on to spearhead the Natatorium/Gymnasium on B Street. It showed great understanding of student support that he leveraged Student Association funds to take out the bonds. It took some footwork on his part but the student body actually owned the facility. The high school shop built the dressing room stalls and lockers. The community rallied to make this a special spot of the entire city.

Thousands of Aberdeen children learned to swim there, from first to tenth grade all students were taught at the “Nat” as it was universally known. For quite a while being able to swim across the pool was a high school graduation requirement. In a community surrounded by rivers it seemed like a smart move. The two gyms were the site of many practices as well as school games.

This far-sighted educator passed quickly after a short illness. At age 45 on May 2, 1930 he was laid to rest following a funeral at the junior high. A few weeks after his passing the Aberdeen Junior High was renamed Miller after him (the Natatorium already bore his name.)

## FISHERMAN WAR

In 1887 Gillnetters controlled the Columbia River fishing, then they moved into Grays Harbor and sent notice to the trap fishermen that they could no longer fish. The result was a battle in which two gillnetters died and another was badly wounded. Arrest warrants were issued for 19 of those who stirred up the war. Sheriff W. H. Bush took a posse of 15 to a bunk house in Aberdeen and was able to arrest 13. They would have been taken to Monte but there was no jail there, so they went on to Olympia. Later the harbor residents presented the sheriff with a watch in thanks for completing the arrests without further bloodshed.

# Electric Shocks, Bomb Squads, Guns, and the Love of Teaching Science at Miller Junior High

by Jim Minkler

I had the pleasure of interviewing Buford Fearing for the Voices of Grays Harbor Oral History Project last year. Buford now lives in Shoreline, Washington, but he grew up in Aberdeen and was eager to share many fond memories he had of those experiences. Although I found all of Buford's childhood stories interesting, I will share what he told me about his father, William Harold Fearing, who was known by his students at Miller Junior High as Mr. Fearing, known as "Dad" by Buford, and as "Harold" by everyone else.

Mr. Harold Fearing taught science at Miller Junior High for over forty years, spanning 1919-1960. Throughout that time, Buford related, his father loved teaching. He graded all of his students' papers and tests personally and was very involved in every aspect of their science education. Harold believed that teaching science involved more than just having students at Miller Junior High study about it. They needed to experience it. Buford described one of the ways his father did this in what follows.

*"My dad had a little routine. A lot of my classmates were not very happy with me but I didn't do it. My dad had a little room behind his desk, and he had a hand-crank generator, and for the last day of school for his class he would take the class out in*

*the hall, blindfold them and have them take off their shoes so they were in their stocking feet. He would run a wire from the generator all the way to the door of his classroom. He made them walk on it and while they did he would hand crank the generator once and give them a jolt. Every kid that knew they were going into his class knew what was coming at the end. He had fun doing stuff with the kids. He was a good science teacher."*

During the span of Harold's long teaching career, of course the world changed and Miller Junior High was certainly not insulated from that. Buford shared the following account.

*"He was also in charge of a bomb squad. When World War II broke out they were not sure whether the Japanese would try to invade the Washington coast so he had to organize a bomb squad at Miller Junior High in case we had an emergency."*

Even after the War, Miller Junior High adapted to societal changes that were happening locally and throughout the country. Some of those changes manifested themselves as new challenges in the classroom. Buford recollected one such incident that

happened to his father.

*"The year before my dad retired, the classroom on the floor above him was empty. When he asked a kid a question, the kid stood up and a pistol fell out of his pocket and went off, going through the floor of the empty classroom above. Luckily it was an empty classroom and no one was in it. That being the last year he taught, he probably thought it was a good time to get out of teaching. It was getting a little dangerous."*



Harold Fearing

Yet despite such incidents, Buford shared that his father really had no desire to retire. He still loved teaching but mandatory retirement in those years was set at the age of sixty. I imagine if Harold would have had a choice he would have chosen the path of a Miller Junior High math educator and administrator who is still teaching today after more than fifty-four years, Mr. Jerry Salstrom. If Harold had been able to do that perhaps their paths would have crossed at Miller.

To read the full interview of Buford Fearing, and Jerry Salstrom for that matter, visit the Friends of the Aberdeen Museum Office and ask to see the Voices of Grays Harbor notebooks.

## History98520

brings you

# Walking Tours of Aberdeen

All tours begin at 200 West Market (K Street entrance)

Tours begin at 1 PM and are conducted by Phil Slep

Reservations are recommended at 360-533-1976

May 4<sup>th</sup> – Aberdeen History

5<sup>th</sup> – Sunday Stroll – Cinco De Mayo

18<sup>th</sup> – Theaters

June 8<sup>th</sup> – Early transportation

9<sup>th</sup> – Sunday stroll – Street cars

21<sup>st</sup> – World Music Day

22<sup>nd</sup> – World Music Day

July 6<sup>th</sup> – 4M Club (Murder, Mayhem, Mystery & Madames)

7<sup>th</sup> – Sunday Stroll – Broadway Hill

20<sup>th</sup> – Churches

21<sup>st</sup> – Sunday Stroll – Lost Buildings

The tours will go on through September and will be announced here each quarter.

**The Walk of the Undead** will also happen this year on October 19<sup>th</sup>. Get it on your calendar!

All tours are free but donations are always appreciated.

### — *Special announcement* —

April 27<sup>th</sup> at 1PM there will be a tour of Downtown Hoquiam in connection to Historic Hoquiam Memories. The tour will begin at the Emerson Manor/Hoquiam Senior Center.

The entire event is scheduled from Noon to 5PM.



# Knock the Dust Off

This special Car Show is presented by the “*Test of Time Car Club*.” It will be held **MAY 18<sup>TH</sup> AT INTERSTATE HONDA (1720 Simpson Avenue Aberdeen)** in the back parking lot. The free to the public event is from 10 am to 2 pm. There will be music, food, and door prizes. Hope you can enter a car. The entry fee is \$15. There will be hand-made trophies and a 50/50. All makes, models, years, cars, trucks & motorcycles are welcome.

**INTERSTATE HONDA is donating \$1000 to the Aberdeen High School Automotive program!**

Proceeds from the show will be donated to the Friends of the Aberdeen Museum toward their work helping the Aberdeen Museum “Rise from the Ashes” of the June 2018 fire.



## UPCOMING DISPLAYS

As always, the Friends of the Aberdeen Museum will continue to share community history with the public. The displays will generally remain in place for two months. They are set up for 1st Friday open til 8 pm. (Thanks to those who loan materials, the Jones Photo Collection, as well as, Connie Parson & Patti Walden who spend so much time bringing these displays to life.)

**March & April** – Fraternal organizations & Service Clubs – Some clubs are still serving the community like the Rotary, Lions, Elks, Beta Sigma Phi, Masons & Eastern Star. Others are gone like the Knights of the Pythias & the Eagles. But they all make fascinating displays.

**May & June** – Music, Music, Music

**July & August** – Brothels, Madames and other “not to be spoken” history

Displays for the rest of the year will be detailed in coming issues.