

Trying to rescue history

In the Pacific Northwest, history falls away. The farther West, the more removed from old Europe, the more artifacts and historic properties feel ancillary. The future (look at our architecture and urban planning, good and ill) is now.

Historical amnesia comes at a cost. A couple miles south of Everett's Legion Park, a project made possible by FDR's Works Progress Administration, stood the old city dock. More than a century ago, immigrants disembarked, pouring into the City of Smokestacks. It's also hallowed ground for organized labor as site of the [1916 Everett Massacre](#). Today there's zero acknowledgement -- let alone a plaque -- to mark the bloodbath that took seven lives.

Saving historic buildings is a tough go. Over the years, the [Washington Trust for Historic Preservation](#) has listed endangered sites in Snohomish County that were subsequently demolished. These include the Scottish Rite Temple and Hewitt block (listed in 2001, razed in 2002); and the Collins Building (listed in 2004, "deconstructed" in 2011.) If you want to get rid of a building, Everett preservationists joke, make sure it's on the National Register of Historic Places (a separate, more elite designation, which included the Collins Building.)

The state's endangered list is not a death sentence in Island County. Preservationists formed Historic Whidbey in part to purchase and restore Haller House in downtown Coupeville, which made the list this year. The home was built in 1866 by Col. Granville Haller, a veteran of the Mexican-American War who was stationed in the 1850s at Fort Dalles in Oregon. During the Civil War, Haller commanded Gen. George McClellan's headquarters' guard in two campaigns. During the Battle of Fredericksburg, he was accused of disloyalty and later separated from the army. Haller then did what folks have done for generations. He rambled West and shed his own history.

Haller thrived in the Pacific Northwest, becoming a successful businessman and investor. He demanded and received a court of inquiry, which in 1873 found him innocent of the disloyalty charge.

Historic Whidbey, which includes volunteers such as Lynn Hyde, the historian at Ebey's Landing National Historical Preserve, is crafting a sustainable business plan to convert Haller House into an historic-house museum. The vision loops in the adjoining Raphael Brunn House, built in 1859 but modernized, to serve as a commercial property to generate income to underwrite operations. If it comes together, Haller House would complement local attractions such as Ebey's Landing and the Island County Historical Museum.

There's a history-minded seller, but Historic Whidbey still needs to raise \$40,000-50,000. Here's a legacy Northwesterners can't afford to let fall away.