

Rainier Valley HERITAGE NEWS



Charles Royer presents Lou DeFranco with City of Seattle proclamation, photograph by Teresa Anderson

RVHS Honors History Maker Lou DeFranco at Founder's Dinner

Rainier Valley Historical Society presented the 2019 History Maker Award to Lou DeFranco for his lifetime of community service.

Lou DeFranco epitomizes a selfless and unwavering community leader and civic activist and has been an inspiration to others to follow in his footsteps. Lou's volunteer career began with St. Edward's Catholic Church and school activities. In 1962, he became involved with the Rainier Chamber of Commerce and was president from 1980-1982. As the 1970s brought about change to Southeast Seattle, Lou's activism and involvement heated up and the local Chamber of Commerce responded with a crime prevention council. In 1987, a new anti-crime group was formed – the South Seattle Crime Prevention Council. Lou and others in the community met monthly with police to stop crime so that businesses could survive. Other organizations benefiting from Lou's association were Graffiti Patrol and St. Vincent de Paul. Lou has been deservedly recognized by the City of Seattle with the Mayor's 1985 Small Business Award for outstanding achievement in our community and by a Washington state 2001 Jefferson Award for a lifetime of service to Rainier Valley. Lou is a patron member of

Rainier Valley Historical Society and served on its board from 2000-2007. And, Lou has been affectionately known as the Mayor of Lakewood-Seward Park!

Lou DeFranco and his wife Theresa Loftus were married in 1950 in Chicago. Just weeks after their wedding, Lou, an insurance salesman, was transferred to Seattle to open the Northwest Territory for Chicago-based North American Life and Health. Lou began downtown at the old White-Henry-Stuart Building. In 1953 he moved to Southeast Seattle and opened DeFranco Insurance. Since 1981, the insurance office has been in the same location on Wilson Avenue and 51st Ave S, where his son John now owns and operates.



DeFranco children pictured with Lou: Jim, Mary, John, Michael, Peggy and Dan, RVHS Founder's Dinner, Oct. 27, 2019. Photo by Teresa Anderson

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Rainier Valley Historical Society
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Seattle, WA 98118

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Monday: 1:30 pm - 7:30 pm
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Saturday: 9 am - 3 pm
& by appointment

Holiday Open House

Saturday, Dec. 7th

1 pm - 4 pm

RVHS Office

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Comet Lodge Cemetery

Comet Lodge Cemetery is one of those stories that seems to constantly come back into the collective conscious, and then just as quickly as it came, it disappears again. Newspapers write about it, there's presumably some outrage and then it disappears, once again.

The cemetery's first recorded burial is of 53 year old pioneer of the area, Samuel Maple (the gravestone spells it Mapel) who died in 1880. The next recorded burials would not be until 1884. The cemetery itself would not be named, or have any relation to Comet Lodge No. 139 of the I.O. O. F. (International Organization of Odd Fellows) until 1895. This is where the name Comet Lodge comes into the story, however most obituaries of people who were interred here state that it is the I.O.O.F. Cemetery-Georgetown. The cemetery hosts some well-known people of their time including Dr. Emma A. Rigby, Samuel Bevan who had been the Mayor of South Park, Henry Van Asselt, and Samuel and Jacob Maple some of the first settlers in Seattle.

The cemetery hosts, 490 known graves, though there may be more since potter's graveyard was moved somewhere in Georgetown in the 1920s and Comet Lodge has been considered a likely place. Most of these graves no longer have their markers, though most of the changes were made to the cemetery after the cemetery itself had been lost by Comet Lodge No. 139, there are some that were made before. In 1927, the first shrinking of the



Katherin Albrecht (Albright) grave site, Comet Lodge Cemetery, circa 1970, Denis Law Collection, RVHS

cemetery to its now 2.5 acre size began, with Dr. Corson and his wife selling a section called Babyland. This spot, that was for the burials of infants and small children, was without disinterment, turned into housing for people. The trend of lack of disinterment is a trend that continued. Once the cemetery closed in 1937, as the lodge had become bankrupt, there was only a handful of people who would disinter their family members as the organization had told them that they would now be in charge of caring for the plots. The graves of the Maples, and Henry Van Asselt were moved to different resting spots (the Maples to King County International Airport, Van Asselt to Lakeview Cemetery). Out of the mentioned 490 graves, only 25 of them would end up being moved, the other 465,

have no records of being moved.

Once the cemetery was foreclosed upon however, it fell completely into disrepair and became a popular spot for sneaking into and, supposedly stealing gravestones, as people assumed everyone who had been buried had been disinterred. There were several attempts at cleaning up the cemetery or rehabilitating it, however most of them fell through.



Johnnie Jones, oldest Brewery worker in Georgetown, burial at Comet Lodge (1910). Photo courtesy of John Dickinson.

The two of the biggest attempts came in 1987 and 1999. Neither were successful for various reasons. In 2002, Cleveland High School students with the Washington State Cemetery Association and a grant from 4Culture worked on a project. This project, in the words of the project itself “would teach research techniques and assign specific informational components of the history of the cemetery and the neighborhood to students or small groups of students. The project also encouraged students to develop a community plan to maintain the cemetery grounds. By educating students, it was the hope of WSCA to develop an appreciation for historical sites in the community and to deter the destruction of cemeteries by young adults.” This was the last attempt at any type of clean up or preservation at Comet Lodge Cemetery. Some time between these clean up attempts most of the gravestones were moved to new positions. Based on a 1976 map, 24 out of 25 remaining gravestones have become cenotaphs, stones that no longer mark the spot of the actual burial.

From death dates and birthdates, to how people viewed those who had passed on or something about the deceased themselves, gravestones can give an astounding amount of historical information, and graves at Comet Lodge Cemetery are no different.

The cenotaphs of Augustus Twombly (d. 1901) and Erwin Rigby (d. 1907) are both tree trunk graves. These graves tend to be

about a life cut short, and these stones were common in some areas, easily bought from a Sears & Roebuck catalogue. For both of them however, it also means they were a member of the Woodmen of the World, a fraternity organization that disbursed insurance and would purchase stones for their members. These stones are usually easy to spot for membership. The top knot above the name will have the symbol of the Woodmen of the World (Now Modern Woodmen of America) two crossed hatchets.

Other cenotaphs in the cemetery also tell stories of those who had lived there in the past. Ernst Pique, a German immigrant has a particularly ornate stone, designed with floral motifs talking highly of him through ivy, ferns, the backside of his stone also has an engraving written in German.

This year we had our first (two!) tours at Comet Lodge where we shared the history of the cemetery, stories of some who were buried there, and discussed the gravestone



Erwin Rigby, member of the Woodmen of the World, tree trunk grave dated 1907. Photo by Karen O'Brien

art. It was a success with two sold out tours with 30 people all together, and I can't wait to do the tour again next year.

- Katharine Anthony, RVHS Program and Archives Manager

Katharine was interviewed by Seattle Refined and Feliks Banel of MyNorthwest.com. Please find articles online *One Night Only: Take a Guided Tour Through one of Seattle's Oldest Burial Places* and *All Over The Map: Beacon Hill's Spooky Comet Lodge Cemetery*



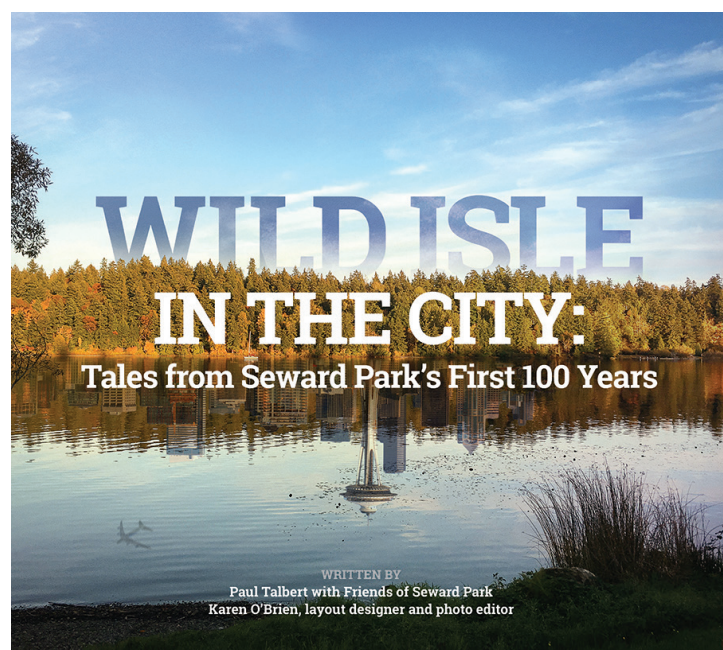
RVHS Program and Archives Manager, Katharine Anthony leading a tour at Comet Lodge Cemetery, Nov. 2nd 2019. Photo by Karen O'Brien

What's new in the Archives

- **Shoji family portrait, 1936, Seattle Times 1987 article about Tomo Shoji and personal letter from Tomo Shoji to the Vieli family in Seward Park, 1944.** Thank you Christine Graham for your donation to the digital archives.
- **Photographs, biographical info, letter and sketch of McClelland family home.** Thank you Carole Grayson for your donation to the digital archives.
- **Photo of fire station #33, 1915, group photo of 7 firemen at station #33, 1916, photo of Fern Hill Florist and Clay Farran, photo of Fern Hill Greenhouse, upper Rainier Beach on 62nd Ave S.** Thank you June Farran for your donation to the digital archives.
- **Six 11x14 aerial photographs: Franklin High School, Rainier Beach High School, Genesee District, Sick's Stadium, Graham Street at Martin Luther King, Chubby & Tubby, W Seattle, circa 1960s.** Thank you Mary and John Charles for your photograph donation.
- **Digital Collection update: We received an \$8,000 King County 4Culture Collection Care grant for Project Archivist Alyssa Enders to digitize select photographs in our collection. Alyssa is processing photographs for online access to our PastPerfect database. 800 images are currently available to view. Visit the RVHS digital collection at: rainiervalleyhistory.pastperfectonline.com**

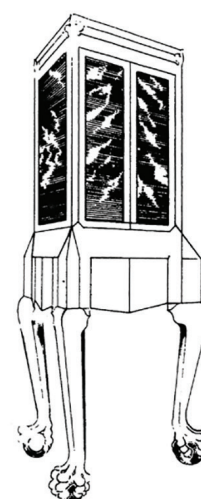


H. Clay Farran, owner of Fern Hill Florist, stands next to his 1937 Hudson. Fern Hill Florist (greenhouse below) was in upper Rainier Beach on 62nd Ave S between Renton Ave and Prentice St. Thank you to June Farran for sharing her father's photos.



Wild Isle is a self-published book by The Friends of Seward Park now sold at Rainier Valley Historical Society. Stop by the office during our Open House on Dec. 7 between 1 and 4 pm or during office hours to pick-up a copy. All book proceeds benefit Seward Park stewardship and the LSPNA scholarship fund. (Hardcover, 366 pages \$49.95)

Wild Isle in the City explores more than a century of natural and human history in Seward Park, Seattle, home to the old-growth Magnificent Forest. With emphasis on environmental history and the ethnic diversity of park users, *Wild Isle* tells the stories of the Lake People and many waves of immigrants, spawning peamouths and nesting eagles, park visionaries and real estate swindlers, urban development and conservation. A community of contributors has created an intriguing and visually stunning homage to the park they love,



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