

# Rainier Valley HERITAGE NEWS

Fall, 2015

## Columbia Electric Bakery - From Spark to Flame

By Nancy Dulaney

The history of bread goes back some 30,000 years, to the hunting and gathering phase of human development. Fast forward a few tens of thousands of years to 1891, and a local version of civilized society crafted by Columbia pioneers began to materialize. Lumber and shingle mills as well as the railway attracted workers who needed their daily bread. Historical records indicate several locations for bakeries along Rainier Avenue between Edmunds and Hudson Street, the two-block stretch originally designated as the business district.



The earliest fraternal lodge hall in Columbia City, the Knights of Pythias Hall in 1909.



Claude McNabb, center, and Florence McNabb, just to the left, at the Columbia Electric Bakery in 1941 after the fire. Photo courtesy: Erika Richardson.

Frank Goetz was the proprietor of Columbia Bakery at 4855 Rainier Avenue beginning in 1914. The building was vintage 1899, a two-story wood frame commercial-residential structure. A bakery as early as 1901, it utilized a brick oven heated by burning cord wood in the baking chamber. The ashes were raked out and then the dough put in to bake. Mr. Goetz advertised "Large Cakes, Pies and Cookies Baked Fresh Every Day." In the late 1920s this building was razed to make way for the brick clad building we see today and refer to historically as the Calvert Bakery building, where  
(continued on page 2)



## News & Notes

### RVHS Open House

Saturday, December 4th, 2015

2:00pm - 4:00pm

RVHS Office

Come by for refreshments, a look at displays of items from the collection, and to renew your membership.

### Office Hours:

Tuesday 1:00pm - 4:00pm

Friday 10:00am - 1:00pm

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& by appointment

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*The Rainier Valley Historical Society's mission is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret the history and heritage of the Rainier Valley and its people, and to promote public involvement in and appreciation of its history and culture.*

*Our geographic boundaries are from Dearborn Street on the north to the city limits on the south, and from the I-5 freeway to Lake Washington.*

## Collections Update

### Some Recent additions:

Cookbook compiled by Southeast Seattle Senior Center, with history of the center on page 2. Donated by Patty Conrad.

Collection of Valhalla yearbooks and newspapers. Donated by Su Harambe.

Buffalo meat grinder used at Casal Grocery and meat market at Rainier Ave. and Atlantic street, with grinding tools. Donated by Sam and Pearl Casal.

Photograph of a boat on Lake Washington, found in 1932 Tolo. Donated by Bonnie Bosworth.

Poster from the 50th Anniversary of Columbia Funeral Home in 1957. Donated by Columbia Funeral Home.

Buffalo meat grinder with a set of grinding tools, used at Casal Grocery and meat market at the corner of Rainier Ave. and Atlantic street. The grinder was used until the shop closed. In 1962, grandson Sam Casal took the grinder home and used it for making homemade sausage and for grinding some meat they got during hunting. Accession #2015.010.0001



Poster for Columbia Funeral Home.



(continued from page 1)

William Calvert baked breads and cakes until about 1930.

About this time, Claude McNabb left Colorado with his wife Florence and children Frank, Frances, Dorothy and Claude Jr., known as "Bink". Claude was headed north to Alaska to start a bakery but after arriving decided "that was no place to raise children." He soon returned to the University District in Seattle where he owned and operated the Mity-Nice Bakery on the Ave. In November of 1931 a burglar fled the bakery with \$7 in loot as pajama-clad Claude pulled the trigger of his revolver five times. By July of 1933, C. H. McNabb was looking for a small bakery to buy or lease, in or out of Seattle. The Columbia Electric Bakery at 4863 Rainier Avenue became that bakery and the McNabbs moved to Columbia City.

At 4863-65 Rainier Avenue stood the two-story Knights of Pythias building. While the building originally featured

an ornate false front with turrets, these decorative elements had been removed by the 1930s. The upstairs community gathering space had become known as Phalen Hall, named after W.W. Phalen who purchased the building in 1901. Bill Phalen, mayor of Columbia City in 1905 and again in 1907, was a successful businessman with "W.W. Phalen, Your Grocer" in the north storefront on the first floor (4863 Rainier).

In the late 1930s, Columbia Electric Bakery ran Saturday specials for lemon filled and three-layer vanilla, chocolate, caramel, or coconut cakes. Also offered were assorted sliced deli meats and cheeses, Claude's home-made mayonnaise (bring in your own container), and their own hand-dipped chocolates - stiff competition for Nick Vamkros' Confectionery just one building to the south. Claude was also known for his rye bread crusted baked hams - customers made special requests for the cracklins left in the pan.

*The Rainier District Times, January 5, 1939, Columbia Electric Bakery Saturday specials advertisement.*

(continued on page 3)

### Specials for Saturday

Jan. 7, 1939

FRUIT CUP CAKES dozen .....	19c
SMALL BUTTER HORNS, 5 for .....	10c
ASST. FRESH FRUIT PIES, each.....	25c
Strawberry, Cherry, Mince, Apple and Wild Blackberry.	
ASST. FRESH HAND MADE CHOCOLATES, Lb. ....	29c
GOLD SHIELD COFFEE, lb. ....	25c
ARMOUR'S FCY. BACON, 1/2 lb..... Cello wrapped	17 1/2 c
FRESH SWEET CREAM BUTTER, lb.	33c
LARGE FRESH CHECK EGGS, doz.	31c

**Columbia Electric  
Bakery**

4863 Rainier Ave.



(continued from page 2)

The Columbia Electric Bakery was a union shop and Happy Cook, their first baker, was known as Cookie by the youngsters. The McNabbs lived blocks from the bakery where Claude left the family home in the early hours to begin his work day. Florence went in later, often walking home in the evenings after closing. Daughters Frances and Dorothy began working at the bakery afterschool and on Saturdays as cashiers waiting on trade. Son Frank helped with the doughnuts.

But it was on Easter Monday, April 14, 1941, that the Columbia Electric Bakery really made the news. At 3:44 a.m., Battalion Chief Lincoln Johnston of Hillman Fire Station answered the first fire alarm and shortly thereafter the

4:19 a.m. While the first floor of the building suffered the least damage, the Columbia Electric Bakery's oven was ruined.

Repairs were made to the building and a new roof was built over the first floor. Phalen's Hall suffered extensive damage and the upstairs wood floor would host dances no more. A new oven was bought for the bakery and the smoke damage cleared out. In August of 1941, Claude McNabb baked the wedding cake for his daughter Dorothy's marriage to Roy Nornholm at Columbia Congregational Church.

In 1942, Claude and Florence McNabb sold the Columbia Bakery and moved to Point Mugu in California after Claude Jr. graduated from Franklin

at some point and it became the Columbia Bakery & Coffee Shop by 1958. During the 1970s and 1980s, La Bakerery was in business and eventually, the Gather Consignment shop we know today opened its doors at 4863 Rainier Avenue South.

*Many thanks to Dorothy McNabb Nornholm for sharing her family memories of the bakery. Our condolences for the loss of her sister Frances McNabb Stowell on June 13, 2015. Frances was a 1939 graduate of Franklin High School, and was employed as a line cook at Franklin High School's cafeteria for many years before retiring. Frances continued to live in her Rainier Valley home on Myrtle Street for 60 years. She was an active member of the Rainier Valley Historical Society.*

*Also thanks to Galen Thomaier, Seattle Fire Department Historian, of Last Resort Fire Department for providing information from their archives about the fire.*



Hillman Fire Station's Engine 28, a 1924 Seagrave 800 GPM pumper, was the first to respond to the 4/14/1941 fire. Photo courtesy: Last Resort Fire Department photo archives.

McNabb family heard a knock at their door. It was a man alerting Claude the bakery was on fire.

Last Resort Fire Department archives reveal the two-alarm fire started when creosote condensate on a smoke pipe ignited as the pipe overheated. The fire spread inside the walls to the other occupancies, up into the attic and through the roof. The fire was determined under control at

High School and was accepted for naval air training in 1943. They joined Claude's sister and husband to manage a restaurant, motel and gas station there.

Frances McNabb continued her work at the bakery with the new owner, Louis Bock who had recently arrived from Yakima, and Happy Cook is rumored to have become the manager. Mr. Bock sold to the Jack Alman brothers

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**Renew your membership today, or become a member for the first time! Or consider giving someone else a membership as part of your holiday gift giving.**



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Many thanks to our members and supporters who make our work possible! Below are those whose gifts we received between April 2nd 2015 and October 17th 2015 Contact us with any corrections or omissions: 206-723-1663 or [director@rainiervalleyhistory.org](mailto:director@rainiervalleyhistory.org).

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## 3rd Annual Founder's Dinner

The dinner and auction in memory of our founder Buzz Anderson was a great event again this year, with excellent Italian food, exciting auction and raffle items, and a great group of people! Thank you to everyone who came or donated in support of the event!

*The Tarantellas, performing Italian songs.*



*Guests outbidding each other during the auction.*




*Remo Borracchini and Art Oberto, posing with the photos of their younger selves on one of the RVHS Garlic Gulch display boards.*



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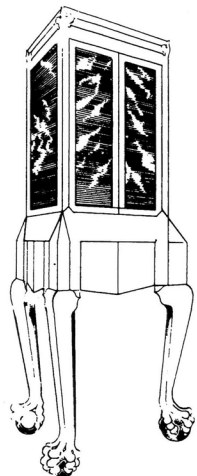


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