

**Lucien Swerdloff**

It seems that the Friends of the Column...still do not comprehend the greater significance of Coxcomb Hill.

The environment that surrounds us is shamefully out of balance: pollution floats down the Columbia River, too many cars and trucks rumble over Commercial Street, the scenic beauty of the coast is continually being overdeveloped. Yet, within the heart of all this is a rare and sacred place: Coxcomb Hill.

To further develop the hill for economic concerns is a misdirected use of good intentions. The mistake is the assumption that the only way to enjoy a space is to defeat it: to construct more buildings, to bring more buses, to provide more snacks and more gifts. This is just not so. There are plenty of opportunities for all these activities nearby.

To experience the intimate immensity of the place is to experience the elements: to walk up the hill, to stand in the rain, to face toward the wind. Who would suggest paving over the beach and enclosing it in glass so that we can walk without getting sand on our feet or salt in our hair? But is not the equivalent being suggested for the hill?

If an interpretive center is to be built, the only viable solution is to build it below in Astoria, perhaps adjacent to the Historical Society. To build it on the hill is to force a building where it should not go. The latest incarnation of the of the center has been so restricted that it has lost all sense of its concept. It has literally been shoved into the ground and its formerly grand central space has been reduced to the geometric centerpoint for the toilets.

**Ruth Hope**

What in Sam Hill is going on down there? Has everyone lost their senses? Why has the Mayor and City Council allowed it to go this far? What a shameful waste of time and money. They and the 'Friends' group have caused my angry passions to rise.

I believe true friends of Astoria would never do anything to draw attention away from the monument or the view. Never pave the hillside for parking lots. Now I read the Friends want to plant the center underground. Ye Gods! How absurd.

Do not spoil what you have. A most perfect site, magnificent views and beautifully restored monument.

Whatever the good intentions the Friends of the Astoria Column might be, my fondest wish for the Column is that wiser heads will prevail.

**Robert J. Ross**

I strongly oppose any structure to be erected on the North or West view location of John Jacob Astor Park. There are certainly more appropriate locations within the vicinity of the Column that would support a visitor center, provide a lovely view for our visitors and *not* inflict a permanent blight on one of our primary view attractions.

If the objective is to make a meaningful contribution to this community, surely we can see the necessity of not causing harm in doing so.

I trust the leadership of this community will consider my opposition to this project and take appropriate action to protect this highly visible feature. A petition group with 1,000 signatures has also stated their concern regarding the proposed action at Astor Park.

**Robyn Starr Dezendorf**

As a former travel consultant of ten years, I was very fortunate to be able to take advantage of the travel that was awarded to me, to many fascinating countries (in the range of forty or so)...always on the lookout for what a lot of clients wanted when they would be on holiday. Over and over again was the cry for visiting places that were historical that had interesting monuments or areas that...were in natural, beautiful, pristine settings without or very little commercialism attached to them. Low profile but with history.

Now as an 11 year resident, moving here because of this beautiful, natural, pristine, quiet North Coast area, I would hope that we would be able to keep this wonderful ambiance. I feel that if we build a large structure it will take away from this natural park-like quality setting that is of paramount importance to the community. Structures like this belong, and are found most of the time, in the middle of big cities. I don't think we want the concrete jungle effect in historical Astoria, not to mention the commercialism, added traffic pattern that we would encounter, and, of course, the large burden the city (the taxpayers) could have in running the daily operations.

This very special, historical site is *just priceless*, let us keep it this way and make minimal, practical, not so commercialized, improvements that will benefit all of us.

**Dian Kazeauskes**

There comes that moment when the artist knows his painting is complete. When it portrays all that is necessary. It speaks for itself.

Such is the Astoria Column. It is finished. Nothing more needs to be said. No interpretation is necessary. The Column is the painting. The glorious views its frame.

I have never heard anyone complain about the lack of an interpretive center or the lack of food, candy or softdrinks at the Column. People come for the view and are then surprised to behold the wonderful pictorial on the Column. Just the drive alone to the Column is lovely.

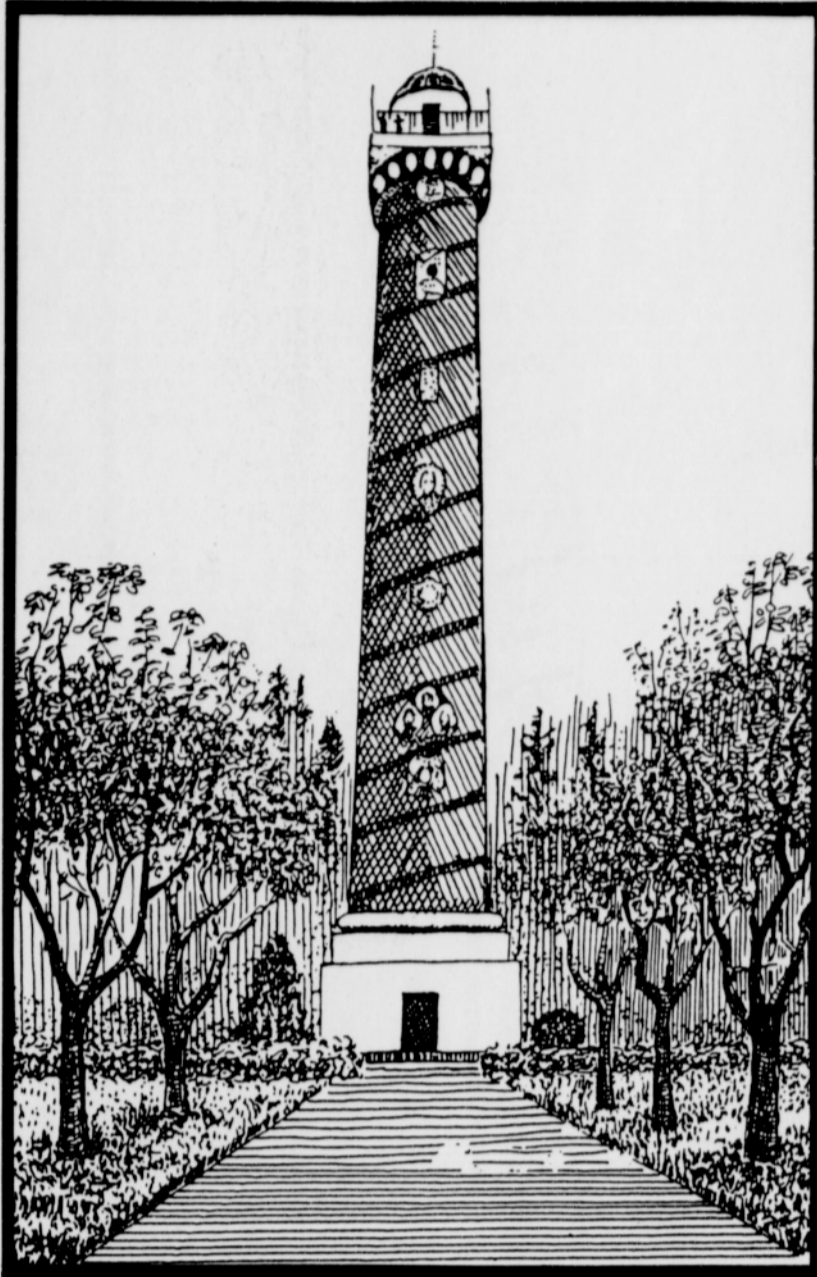
I have questioned many tourists and my own family, and I have found not one person who thinks an interpretive center is needed.

At one of the Council meetings...the landscape consultant for the Friends of the Column, referred several times to this area as "sacred ground." If this is "sacred ground," then let us not disturb more of it.

**Anne Witt**

The Astoria Column park provides a haven of quiet, fresh air, and magnificent views. Crowned with the Column itself, it is one of Astoria's finest public spaces. Its very openness is a priceless legacy that should be preserved for future generations.

By definition, the parks belong to all the citizens of Astoria. I urge our leaders to listen carefully to citizens' voices before approving extensive construction at the Astoria Column site. We should all think carefully about which legacies we wish to leave; open green spaces and sweeping views, or a park clogged with parking lots and an interpretive center that turns its back on the very monument that should be the focus of attention. The Column and its setting are priceless — let's not overbuild this place.



WILLIAM MICHAEL SCHUSTER (1989)

**George I. Gunn**

I am strongly opposed to any changes being made to the Astoria Column. Just because some individual with money wants to construct an edifice to perpetuate the family name, at the expense of our beautiful Column, is not a valid reason to change things up there. Why are you trying to interpret something so obvious?

**FOOTPRINTS**

BY CAROLYN DUNN

In previous centuries, our human footprint was small, and monuments to our intelligence and skill — such as the construction of buildings and plazas — were viewed as necessary assumptions of our presence. Our planet now has been dominated by human life and human activity; our footprint is huge.

Posterity will look for signs of this time's collective energy and wisdom. In doing so, will it look for places where we have constructed yet more parking lots, more trinket shops and more information booths (small or large)? I do not think so. I believe it is already an inevitability that our children and their children will search the world to find the preserved islands of the natural world in which a possibility exists to have direct experience with it.

These will be the places, save at considerable cost, where human intervention is the quietest, where the human footprint is the most difficult to find. These places will be the revered monuments which our time has extended as a gift to the future. Saved from cars, noise, commerce and ubiquitous interpretation, these islands of undisturbed nature will constitute our Parthenon, our Eiffel Tower, our Golden Gate Bridge.

In the continued unimpeded experience of the natural world which Coxcomb Hill provides, we offer to posterity our finest gift — and one which may even represent our holy-of-holies, economic sacrifice: this gift is the inheritance of noninterference.

The most effective way, at the beginning of the 21st century, to tell the story of the "settling of the West," is not to build buildings, play music, sell souvenirs, pave parking lots and offer interpretations, but to provide the opportunity for direct experience.

If we want to say anything at all about the West, it should be this. Our ancestors were people who, in hardship and exhilaration, had direct experience of all we now see, hear and feel from Coxcomb Hill: there lies the land, the wide sky and all the mysterious waters of cloud, rain, river and sea.

The Internet may give us infinite babble, endless information and tireless opportunity for commerce. By inference, subtly, it seems to indicate a direction for our human lives, a mandate to proliferate information and commerce into every part of our lives. But Coxcomb Hill, undisturbed, gives us our real direction as well as our real sustenance, which includes the phenomena of quietness and scope and the inherent possibilities therefore of experiencing perspective, humility, beauty and joy.

The Astoria Column gives pleasure to many, and all of us are pleased that the restoration was done intelligently. Clearcutting was allowed on the site, and we have had to make our peace with that, each in our own way. Let's leave our intervention at that.

Most visitors to Coxcomb Hill, both local and from afar, visit it for the view, and for the total direct experience such a place offers us.

The reason we ascend Coxcomb Hill or any high place in the world, is to live, for a moment, in the presence of the total creation of which we are but a small part, and thus to be aware, once again, of our relation to it.

From this quiet, unimpeded experience, we gain the peace and the courage to descend, once again, into our individual and collective lives.

Carolyn Dunn is a poet who lives in Astoria.

**Valerie M. Ball**

I entreat (Mayor Willis Van Dusen) not to approve the proposed building of a large visitor/interpretive center and expanded parking area in Astor Park in such close proximity to the Astoria Column. These proposed structures would substantially detract from the gem-like setting for the Column and would seriously downgrade the natural beauty that is woven as a common thread throughout the rich and colorful history of the Astoria area.

I realize, of course, that history and progress share every city's evolution, but I cannot remain silent when progress imperils the qualities or beauty that makes an area special. Thus, I urge you to seek alternatives so that visitors continue to enjoy the Column and Astor Park — a shuttle service similar to that at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello would serve our Column equally well.

Future generations will condemn us for our waste; therefore, please don't approve the plopping of an overgrown building and parking lot like a cow pie at the base of the Astoria Column.

**Nancy Spaan**

Everyone in this county appreciates all that (Friends of the Astoria Column) has done to restore the Column, but restoration and new building that destroys views are two very different things. I think it is unfair to have design decisions made to benefit tourists who will spend a fascinating hour or two at the Column when those of us who live here and return over and over for more reasons than the Column itself feel left out.

The reason so many of us go there so frequently is the spectacular view; specifically from the picnic area across the field that is being discussed as a future parking lot. It doesn't make sense to build anything that will in the process destroy any part of the reason for being there in the first place.

**William Barnett**

I think the Astoria Column should be left alone to convey its own message...

By all means stabilize it and improve the restrooms. But let's start parking all those buses and RVs somewhere down the hill, ideally where there is already plenty of food and shopping.

If, as I suspect, the indoor replica and interactive video-enhancement is an inevitable extension of the souvenir stand with blaring music, let's put them in an Astoria theme park somewhere else — and not further congest a formerly quiet hilltop retreat.

**MargWen Land**

Loved the sightseeing! The Astoria Column site was quite breathtaking! I've never seen a monument etched in that manner! And what a view!

I hope you won't mind if I say that I was concerned about your charming city's plans to add additional structures, parking lots, etc., to the site of the Column. Should you have the opportunity to express opinions of some tourists, please urge them *not* to do it. It would absolutely spoil the view and ambiance of the site, though I personally feel it would be a great step forward to move that film shack in front to some out-of-sight rear location!

I've traveled all over and have been saddened by cities defacing historic sites by surrendering to moneyed interests who just want to make a buck at the cost of the beauty of the site. Mount Rushmore is a Sterling Example! It is a flashy, souvenir mess amidst tons of concrete. The trees and flora & fauna were the price. Such a shame! The natural, virgin scene is gone and will never be the same.

(From a letter to LaRee Johnson, who sent it to Astoria Mayor Willis Van Dusen.)

**Don Marshall**

Instead of wasting money on an interpretive center up at the Column, my uncle says we should build a large climate controlled dome over the city. That way, we could dictate the weather to the satisfaction of the tourists as well as ourselves. He says the expense would be far less than that other thing.

**Ute K. Swerdloff**

Does the simple and sublime Astoria Column need an architectural rival on Coxcomb Hill?

Isn't it the fact the Column stands majestically alone that makes it such a beautiful structure to behold? The Column was erected on Coxcomb Hill so people can relate what is depicted on the Column to what they see all around them. To marvel at what once was and what still remains. That is an act of interpretation.

A building...and an adjacent large parking lot filled with sun reflecting car hoods will rob visitors of the imagination of what was here 200 years ago and only leave them mourning for what is lost.

Friends of the Column reconsider! There must be other, better ways you can express your friendship to the Column.... Make the kind of gift so you will be remembered not only as Friends of the Column, but friends of Coxcomb Hill and the citizens of Astoria.

**Roger McKay**

As I am one of the painters in the restoration of the Astoria Column, I feel a personal love and attachment to it, and the grounds around it.

When I first heard of plans to build an interpretive center, complete with a large-size scale model of the Astoria Column inside, I thought: "What a silly idea." I was told the thinking is that a smaller, indoor Column would be more comfortable and easier to see all the scenes.

It's like saying, *Sorry folks, we know we have crummy weather, we know our Astoria Column is just too darn big and high, so you have to crane your neck too far, it gets uncomfortable. You can hardly see the scenes at the top, and your glasses might get rained on. Poor things. Come on in, where you will be comfortable and get a smaller but still 'Column experience.'*

Then there is the parking lot expansion plan. Instead of looking down the beautiful green grassy slope, we would be looking at a big parking lot full of cars and campers.

One of the greatest things about the Astoria Column is the view. Standing anywhere on the grounds around the Column, you get a fantastic view, greatly enhanced by the grounds themselves. The only obstruction now is the rude little concession stand plunked right in the middle of the view, I suppose to attract more business than if it were part of the restroom building, where I think it belongs.

I am horrified to think of a huge new building plunked right in the middle of the view. Then we would have the hustle and bustle of all the traffic, the expansive parking lots and the lines of people.

Our once quiet, peaceful, scenic and historic place would be lost forever.