

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

# Graveyards speak if we listen

The dead are always with us. That is especially so in a town as old as Astoria. Our cemeteries are a walk through history, the human comedy and sorrow.

We are accustomed to seeing change agents in Clatsop County. Mike and Lynda Leamy, as profiled by Katie Frankowicz in the April 27 edition, are change agents of a different sort. Their project is not urban renewal; it is cemetery renewal. Having purchased Greenwood Cemetery — located off state Highway 202 — in the 1980s, the Leamys have set about restoration of its oldest section, established in 1891.

Astoria's first graveyard was a potter's field downtown. Then burials occurred at the top of the hill. That hilltop cemetery is the site of another renewal project. It will gain new signage and interpretation, and it will revert to its original name. In an April 7 article, Edward Stratton reported the Astoria City Council's decision to change the name of this graveyard from Pioneer Cemetery to Hillside Cemetery, as it was previously known.

The best news is that students in Clatsop Community College's historic preservation program are doing much of the interpretive and restoration work.

Hillside Cemetery, located at 15th and Niagara, is a mystery or a puzzle to many Astoria newcomers. Some 20 years ago, I asked the architectural historian John Goodenberger and the archivist Liisa Penner to give me an interpretation of the cemetery.

I had long been intrigued with the small mausoleum that houses the remains of Susan Shively in the cemetery's northeast corner. Because of her philanthropy and her willingness to endure a jury trial to gain a divorce, Shively is an interesting character in early Astoria. I remember Goodenberger's describing how townspeople strapped coffins with rope and pulled them through the mud, up the hill to get to Hillside. He also noted there were likely bodies buried under the surrounding streets.

Cemeteries are fascinating and often heartbreaking places to visit. There is a slope at Ocean View Cemetery in Warrenton that contains a number of graves of



A stone plaque marks Astoria Pioneer Cemetery.

Edward Stratton/The Astorian

*MOVING ASTORIA'S BURIAL GROUNDS OUTSIDE OF THE CITY AND INTO THE COUNTRYSIDE WAS PERHAPS A FAINT ECHO OF THE RURAL CEMETERY MOVEMENT. IN THEIR LABORS AT GREENWOOD CEMETERY, THE LEAMYS HONOR THAT LEGACY.*

infants and young children.

Talking Tombstones — the autumnal event started in 2004 by McAndrew Burns of the Clatsop County Historical Society — has drawn hundreds to interpretive tours of the county's cemeteries. With actors playing the roles of the deceased, the humanity of a cemetery springs to life. It is our version of Thornton Wilder's play "Our Town."

Some of America's most fascinat-

ing real estate is cemeteries. If you are in southwest Portland with a few hours to kill, River View Cemetery — off Macadam Avenue and near Lewis & Clark College — is a jaw dropper, for two reasons. Riverview is Portland's social register brought to life. All of the city's street names are there in their family plots. The suffragist, newspaper founder and prolific writer Abigail Scott Duniway lies about 200 feet from her brother, Harvey Scott.

Abigail has gained more immortality than Harvey, but hers is a humble gravestone, while Harvey's is a monument.

River View Cemetery's other great attraction is its foliage. The size and scale of its trees and shrubs are dramatic. That emphasis on landscape and nature are part of the rural cemetery movement of the 19th century, which began in New England, inspired by the transcendentalist movement, evoked by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Mount Auburn Cemetery outside Boston, in Cambridge, is a stunning example of that movement.

Moving Astoria's burial grounds outside of the city and into the countryside was perhaps a faint echo of the rural cemetery movement. In their labors at Greenwood Cemetery, the Leamys honor that legacy.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of *The Astorian*, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A bold decision

We always feel a deep sense of respect and admiration for citizens who step up to serve their community in elected positions. These are often thankless jobs, and are often caught up in controversy and criticism.

Saying all that, we are thanking all of the candidates for the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District: five incumbents and five challengers who have been willing to step up to serve.

We will be voting for the five incumbents in this case: Su Coddington, Celeste Tuhy Bodner, Michael A. Hinton, Erika Marshall-Hamer and Katharine Parker. These five directors made a bold decision to purchase the old Broadway Middle School in an effort to preserve this land for public use and to expand the recreational and child care needs of the district.

A controversial decision for sure. Some think irresponsible, others think bold and farsighted.

The district now owns that property and what we haven't heard from any of the challengers is what their plan or strategy is to develop and utilize the property the district now owns. Do they plan to give it back to the school district?

On the other hand, the SEPRD board and their executive director are proceeding with aggressive plans and financial analysis on how best to utilize the facility to best serve the taxpayers in the district.

We, as taxpayers in the district, would like to give the directors and the leadership of the district the opportunity to see this project out to its full potential.

Let's not change horses in midstream.

JAY and JAN BARBER  
Seaside

### A beautiful component

I appreciated the update article on wolves in northeast Oregon ("New report shows wolf population continues to grow," April 24).

I've had the privilege of seeing four wolves in the wild in Alaska, and in every case they were doing their best to create distance between us. A friend and long-

term resident of Alaska knows of a handful of wolf attacks on humans over several decades, a small number compared to attacks from bears and moose.

I think wolves are a beautiful component of wild areas, and should be preserved, as our state is doing. And, I hope that our attempts to make money in natural areas will value the lives of wolves along the way.

FRANK SATTERWHITE  
Astoria

### Risk

Here we are on April 22, up in the COVID-19 high risk in Clatsop County ("County to move into high risk for virus," *The Astorian*), and the tourists keep coming out to the coast for the weekend.

Meanwhile, Astoria city councilors have, for a second time, denied Mark Hollander a permit extension to build a four-story hotel on the Columbia River waterfront. ("Astoria again denies hotel appeal," *The Astorian*).

What if every room in every existing hotel in Astoria were occupied and the occupant(s) arrived in an auto looking for a parking place, the town would be one giant traffic jam.

Let's hope the City Council makes a final denial at an early May meeting for any Hollander permit extension.

JUANITA B. PRICE  
Astoria

### Constructive, positive change

Election signs and tulips are popping up around the neighborhood. It must be time to get serious about our local election.

There is a pressing need to replace the present Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board members. Only one board member has been elected. The rest were appointed without serious past experience.

I feel they have not fully used their positions and, instead, relied upon others' directions and opinions. This may account for what happened when they purchased Broadway Middle School.



KUPER

"No, I'm pretty sure they're only easing restrictions on face masks."

One member tells us we don't see "the vision." This is weak, and cannot be supported by common sense. What was needed was a willingness to take professional advice and comments from the public before they allowed the purchase of the old building.

We need to look at the five extremely qualified citizens who are offering their service. Steve Morrison is an example of one of the business people bringing lifetime skills in strategic planning and financially sound decision-making.

Steve, and the other candidates, will use their business expertise to bring order to both the board and the management

structure. Logical thinking that is mission-driven, based on facts, will bring order and practicality to this middle school purchase.

Steve is new to the community, but will support best business practices and programs that provide for the needs of all members of the community.

Time-tested professional, responsible and educated leadership is being offered. What a wonderful opportunity for the future of the SEPRD.

Vote for a constructive and positive change.

KATHY SAMSEL  
Seaside