Think you know Clark County history? Well, step right up and venture *if you dare* down Curiosity Alley. Get answers to questions you never asked. See objects from the bowels of the museum that terrify workers and spawn horrifying tales of preservation. The stories in this exhibit range from banal to bizarre, trivial to traumatic. Proceed with caution, for sights seen cannot be unseen, the known cannot be unknown. Are you brave enough? Are you strong enough? Are you *curious*?
As long as humans have lived, they have been compelled to collect. What we now call museums or ‘cabinets of curiosities’ have enthralled visitors for centuries. Early cabinets gathered diverse collections of art, antiques and natural history specimens intended to give visitors insight and knowledge into the world around them (although some failed to respect the cultures and artifacts offered for examination, and came upon their wares by unscrupulous means). We hope you enjoy Clark County’s Curiosity Corner.
Communities from New York to New Orleans, from Oklahoma to Oregon, love their heritage trees. But few rival Clark County’s devotion to their own roots.

**Apple of Our Eye**

Legend tells of Aemilius Simpson, a British naval officer, attending a farewell dinner before his departure for the Northwest in 1825. A young woman slipped a few apple seeds from the dessert into his jacket pocket, suggesting, “plant these when you reach your Northwest wilderness.” Having no use for a dinner jacket in the wild, Simpson forgot about the seeds until he reached Fort Vancouver. During a formal dinner, he rediscovered the seeds and bestowed his long-traveled gift upon Dr. John McLoughlin, who had the seeds planted in 1826. In later years, this first (and oldest living) apple tree in the Pacific Northwest had a brush with greatness when fruit from its branches was used by “Mrs. Fay G. Peabody, official apple pie baker for Oregon and Washington, [in a pie] presented to President Franklin D. Roosevelt…” The original tree still stands in Old Apple Tree Park at 112 Columbia Way in Vancouver, while many of its descendants thrive, including the one on the museum’s northwest lawn.

**The Elm’s Realm**

Many great things have humble beginnings, like the sapling planted in front of the Vancouver Public Library in 1915. For 93 years, this elm grew into a landmark in downtown Vancouver. This iconic tree provided shelter for Main Street strollers, library patrons, and later, guests to this museum with its encompassing and cooling shadow. In 1999, the tree contracted a fatal disease, armillaria, which undermined its immense roots. Three metal braces were placed to reduce the load the tree had to bear, but in vain. In 2008, the great tree, buckling and bending its braces, was deemed a safety hazard. Piece by piece, this symbol of Clark County history was carved from the heart of Vancouver.

**Bearing Witness**

In May 1923, local horticulturist and nut specialist Andrew A. Quarnberg stood before the Clark County Commissioners to bequeath a young sapling that possessed a history much greater than its stature. The story begins in 1845 with the arrival of Vancouver pioneer Amos Short in what was then British territory. Setting boundaries for his land claim, Short chose a “magnificent Balm of Gilead” [cottonwood family] as his point of reference. This tree became one of Clark County’s beloved landmarks; known as the Witness Tree. It was rumored that Lewis and Clark tied their canoe to that very tree during their Pacific Northwest expedition. In its final days, the tree had reportedly reached a height between 75 and 100 feet. On July 1, 1909, the citizens of Clark County awoke to this sad news: “Disgusted with its surroundings and with the little respect in which it seemed to be held by members of the city council and others the old Witness Tree…at four o’clock last Sunday afternoon committed suicide by plunging into the Columbia river. Its death is upon the hands of those who refused to minister to its wants in its old age.”

Many residents took sentimental souvenir tokens from the prostrate tree, and two years passed before the tree launched itself into the Columbia and “into history” as citizens noted in 1911.
But for every good doctor, there was a huckster trying to make a quick buck selling curious concoctions. These tonics, tablets, and ointments were referred to as patent medicines and contained ingredients that could cause more harm than good. One such medicine used in Clark County was Injection Brou, which claimed to cure venereal disorders. Its ingredients were cocaine, catechu, lead acetate, zinc sulphate water, and alcohol.

Furthermore, many of these medicines were claimed panaceas, including a Clark County favorite, Hamlin’s Wizard Oil. Hamlin’s promised to cure rheumatism, muscle aches and pains, inflammation of the kidneys, neuralgia, headache, toothache, earache, deafness, sore throat, diphtheria, croup, burns, scalds, ulcers, tumors, cholera, colic, indigestion, dyspepsia, and stomach or bowel pains, just to name a few. A diet lacking in fruits and vegetables may have made such cure-alls appealing to Clark County residents.

The marketing of patent medicines was often as bizarre as the concoctions themselves. In 1892, the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company became a long-running act at Samuel Marsh’s Standard Theater on Fifth Street just east of Main in Vancouver. This “entertainment” was a device to gather crowds and hawk a tonic called The Little Doctor in the House. This potion’s purveyor claimed it could “cure a headache in one minute, toothache in a second...colic and cramps in the stomach instantly, [and] all chronic diseases of the liver, kidneys, stomach and blood were ‘speedily dispelled.’” Luckily, with the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906, many of these remedies’ retailers were put out of business.

In the late 19th century, specialties such as dermatology, neurology, obstetrics and urology were being introduced in medical schools. Following the scientific method, doctors began to record both procedures and results, giving birth to evidence-based medicine.
America experienced an explosion of entertainment in the 19th century. The nation was flooded with touring theatrical performances, medicine shows, circuses, variety and minstrel shows. Meanwhile, back at Fort Vancouver, formal entertainment arrived by sea in 1846. While still disputed whether presented offshore or on land, the Northwest's first professional theatrical performance was given by the acting troupe from the HMS Modeste.

By the late 1870s, the county's entertainment choices were expanding. When the Maguire Dramatic Company set up shop in the area, the Vancouver Independent reported, “John Maguire opened his ‘olio of oddities’ at Brant's Hall...to a full house.” Maguire’s comedic performance prompted the comment, “the laughable portion of the performance was relished by all present.”

With the 20th century rise in movie houses and television, interest in live entertainment ebbed. Film and television began to reign supreme, with entertainment districts cropping up in most Clark County communities by the 1950s.

On October 5, 1876, Montgomery Queen’s Circus performed in Vancouver during its west coast tour. Queen's circus highlighted D’Atalie the Female Sampson, Drayton the Subduer of Hyenas, Thompson the Educator of Elephants, Nat Austin the Clown of Clowns and a “long list of living wild beasts of the very rarest kinds.”
One such account from 1928 documents young George Cady's bungled attempt to pacify R.E. Johnson, the head of the American Railway Express office in Vancouver, with a heavy metal tuba mouthpiece stuffed into a glove. Johnson was merely stunned by the attack, while Cady lost his nerve and ran. Cady was later apprehended and charged. Upon his capture, Cady stated that he was not aware he had struck Johnson and, "just did things like that now and then."

Some crimes are remarkable not for their own details, but for the community's reaction. On July 11, 1890 Edward Gallagher lost sight of this world as a black hood was slipped over his head and a noose placed around his neck. Until this point, Gallagher had been defiant and dubious about the reality of his impending death penalty, which had been conferred for a murder in Skamania County. For local residents, Gallagher's hanging near 11th and Harney Streets in Vancouver, Washington was a macabre piece of fanfare and entertainment. It was reported that the sheriff had issued 200 tickets for the morbid event. But on the day of the execution, nearly 500 people showed up, including men, women, and children. An "enterprising Portland woman…persisted in setting up a peanut stand within twenty-five feet of the gallows." As "the sheriff attempted to handcuff…Gallagher he fought like a tiger and exhibited super human strength. Six stout men had their hands full to handle him," but he was finally subdued. Moments later, the trapdoor opened and the rope became taut while all signs of life escaped the form that was once Edward Gallagher. His body was cut down, falling "to the ground with a sickening thud." His remains were placed in a potter's grave at the city cemetery.

Modern Americans are no strangers to stories of bizarre crimes. The internet is full of strange occurrences, like the thief who blurts "I'm stuck and I have to poop," thus waiving his Miranda rights, or tales of smugglers attempting to bring exotic birds, reptiles, or mammals across the border...in their pants. But odd misdeeds are not unique to our day and age. Clark County has seen its fair share of strange crimes over the years.

The Oregonian draws it pretty strong concerning the witnesses of Gallagher's execution Friday, as regards the women and children. Certainly it was no place for them and we don't believe a woman can be found in north Vancouver who would admit that she was there either, but some of them were, just the same. Women who would attend such places out of curiosity—for there can be no other reason,—should be ashamed of such conduct, say nothing of permitting children to hang over the stockade and peep through the cracks in the fence, that should have been closed from their publicity. Of course it was wrong, yet these people will compare favorably in point of morals and intelligence to Portland's laboring suburban population. But how about the enterprising Portland woman who persisted in setting up a peanut stand within twenty-five feet of the gallows? Her enterprise was great and her moral condition not at all in the way of showing the characteristic Oregon enterprise. If the Oregonian remembers Portland suffered a similar experience to Vancouver when Archie Johnson was executed there several years ago. However, Portland, some way or other, always manages to find fault with her smaller neighbors, and entirely loses sight of the fact that she was once even smaller than Vancouver. But then, she is a metropolis, you know, and has had all her charity knocked out by the census enumerators.
Between September 11 and 13, 1902, a massive forest fire raged in northeastern Clark County near Yacolt. It was reported that a “hurricane of fire” had engulfed homes, businesses, and logging camps. Dozens of lives were lost. One report detailed the harrowing but vain attempt of a family to escape the “suffocating smoke [which] brought unconsciousness and a sleep that knew no waking.” Their bodies were found only 150 feet from their wagon. All that remained were the blackened iron hoops of the wagon’s wheels. In total, the fire reduced 238,920 acres of timber to ash. Yacolt recovered, but only to experience destructive burns again in 1929 and 1945.

On May 30, 1948 the city of Vanport, a wartime housing project south of Vancouver boasting 40,000 residents, was inundated with water from the Columbia River without warning. On the north side of the river, “the flood resulted in the temporary loss of 3,000…jobs in the Vancouver area, and the city was cut off…by highway and rail from Portland.” One of the largest employers in Clark County, ALCOA, was “surrounded by levees [and] continued to operate although it was an island in the swollen river.” Clark County recovered, but Vanport was never rebuilt.

An advisory at 10:10 am on October 12, 1962 (Columbus Day) read “a very deep vigorous storm…is moving in a northeasterly direction and is expected to be centered over the ocean near the mouth of the Columbia River this afternoon.” Darkness fell over Clark County as Typhoon Freda battered buildings and uprooted trees with winds up to 90 miles per hour. Providence Academy lost most of its roof, allowing rain to pour into the attic and top floor. Windows at the Grant House blew out and the second story railing was torn from the structure. Several hangars at Pearson Airpark were destroyed leaving a scene resembling “a gigantic aircraft junkyard.” It was estimated that Clark County sustained nearly 15 million dollars in damages.

One summer morning the entire population were startled by the rumbling and shaking of the earth… the sun became obscured by an eclipsed, and darkness added its horrors to the scene… when the rain of ashes began to fall… [it was] so heavy… that there was little difference between day and night.” This account from a Spokane chief interviewed in 1907 detailed the eruption of Mount St. Helens around 1802. Nearly 180 years later at 8:32 am on May 18, 1980, the sleeping behemoth awoke to once again unleash its fury. Geologist David Johnston’s message, “Vancouver! Vancouver! This is it!” rang over a transistor radio, marking the beginning of the eruption. Johnston was one of 61 people who lost their lives that day. Ash again turned night to day. Thick layers of soot covered homes and business, air traffic was halted, and most ground transportation was disrupted. The eruption leveled 200 square miles of forest. Nearly two million birds, fish, and animals were consumed by the superheated gas cloud, and 26 lakes were evaporated or buried.

Clark County residents may feel insulated from nature’s wrath, often watching from a distance as natural disasters of epic proportions devastate large swaths of our nation. But Clark County has grappled with Mother Nature’s fury throughout its history.

One of the six tornado fatalities occurred in 1972.

Rescuers at WareMart, where five of the six tornado fatalities occurred in 1972.

Courtesy of The Columbian

Pearson Air Field after the Columbus Day Storm in 1962.

cchm09779

The US Forest Service documented the devastation of the 1902 Yacolt Burn.

cchm03890

Flood damage viewed from Vancouver during the Vanport Flood of 1948.

cchm04002

Hermine Duthie captured this photograph of an erupting Mt. St. Helens from Clark County’s Chelatchie Valley in 1980.

cchm06019

One of the largest employers in Clark County, ALCOA, was “surrounded by levees [and] continued to operate although it was an island in the swollen river.” Clark County recovered, but Vanport was never rebuilt.
A series of small, prehistoric ceramic artifacts have been cloaked in mystery since their discovery near Lake River, which runs between Vancouver Lake and the Columbia River in Clark County, Washington; and on the other side of the Columbia in Multnomah County, Oregon (Sauvie Island). They have been dated to 1210-1330 AD and appear to have little connection to local native tribes, who had no clay-fired ceramics tradition in their culture. Many pieces depict physical features that differ from the locals, too. Almond eyes, curly hair or dreadlocks, even freckles have been suggested by researchers. An early (debunked) theory assigned the creation of the ceramics to a shipwrecked Asian sailor named Shoto. While the source of these ceramics continues to be studied, it’s been suggested that the people attached to these artifacts appeared out of nowhere and only remained in the area a short time (less than 200 years).

Clark County abounds with supernatural tales, but few are as eerie as the accounts of an apparition walking the Interstate Bridge on crisp fall evenings. A tall, slender man in early 20th century style clothing has been reported walking the Interstate Bridge’s northbound span at night by Clark County residents for years. Drivers seeing him are often compelled to look in their rearview mirrors for another glimpse of this forlorn individual only to find he has vanished. While this iconic bridge has claimed the lives of several Clark County citizens over the years, one sad tale seems to best match this specific apparition.

It all began with a long walk. On Sunday, October 17th, 1920, Vancouver Mayor G.R. Percival “arose…and left [his home] about 9 o’clock, telling his wife he was going for a long walk. Later, it was found he had left his watch, purse and money and identification card in his bed.” It was not unusual for Percival to take long walks, but when he failed to return home that night, many became concerned. Over the ensuing weeks, local newspapers were brimming with accounts of the search launched to find the missing city official. Some friends had observed, “that his mind may have broken under the strain of worry and ill health.” Reports of sightings of the missing Mayor flooded in from as far as Seattle, but in late November, the horrifying truth was discovered. Percival was finally found on Hayden Island “below the North Bank railroad bridge.” Percival had hung himself on the island, remaining in his final repose for over a month before the discovery of his body. His family was grief-stricken and devastated by the revelation of his death. It was clear that on G.R. Percival’s final long walk, he had taken the Interstate Bridge to Hayden Island to execute his woeful task. Is it possible that on fall evenings, motorists speeding across the bridge are witnessing the final regretful march of the former Vancouver mayor?

Follow in Their Footsteps

Stories of the Great Northern Ape, Bigfoot or Sasquatch have been passed down for years in Clark County. The largest number of sightings took place in the 1970s and 80s. In 1974, during what was referred to as the “summer Sasquatch hunting season,” it was reported that “161 massive footprints – 18 inches long” had been found and were believed to be traces of a marauding Sasquatch in southwest Washington. By 1980, signs of the creature, real or imagined, continued to crop up around the county. In October 1980, a Yacolt man who thought “Bigfoot was only a myth,” was made into a believer. During a hunting trip in the Yacolt area, he came across a series of large footprints that defied explanation other than traces of the elusive beast. While some southwest Washington residents have admitted they perpetrated hoaxes around the hairy monster, the fascination with this figure has yet to wane for many Clark County citizens.

A Bridge Too Far

Clark County abounds with supernatural tales, but few are as eerie as the accounts of an apparition walking the Interstate Bridge on crisp fall evenings. A tall, slender man in early 20th century style clothing has been reported walking the Interstate Bridge’s northbound span at night by Clark County residents for years. Drivers seeing him are often compelled to look in their rearview mirrors for another glimpse of this forlorn individual only to find he has vanished. While this iconic bridge has claimed the lives of several Clark County citizens over the years, one sad tale seems to best match this specific apparition.
**Clark County Countdown**

Clark County citizens and visitors are often curious about the people, places and events in the county’s past. Here are some historic highlights.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 4, 1805</td>
<td>Lewis and Clark expedition views future site of Vancouver</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 19, 1825</td>
<td>British Hudson’s Bay Company dedicates first Fort Vancouver near current site of State School for the Deaf</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 27, 1844</td>
<td>Oregon Provisional Government establishes District of Vancouver, which is renamed Vancouver County the following year</td>
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<td>June 15, 1846</td>
<td>Treaty between United States and Great Britain cedes territory south of 49th parallel to the United States</td>
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<td>August 14, 1848</td>
<td>President Polk signs act creating Oregon Territory; Oregon Territorial Legislature becomes first official United States government in the Pacific Northwest</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 3, 1849</td>
<td>Oregon Territorial Legislature renames Vancouver County 'Clark County' to honor William Clark of the Lewis and Clark expedition</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2, 1853</td>
<td>Congress establishes the Washington Territory, a clerk accidentally adds an ‘e’ to Clark County, an error lasting 72 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 1, 1855</td>
<td>First Clarke County Courthouse completed, a frame structure costing $440</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1856</td>
<td>Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart and four Sisters of Providence arrive in Vancouver from Montreal</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 14, 1860</td>
<td>Hudson’s Bay Company vacates Fort Vancouver</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 21, 1868</td>
<td>First Clarke County Fair held at current site of Esther Short Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 1874</td>
<td>Mother Joseph’s House of Providence Academy dedicated</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 29, 1882</td>
<td>Construction begins on new (2nd) county courthouse south of current courthouse site, facing 11th Street (burns down in 1890)</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 11, 1889</td>
<td>President William Henry Harrison signs proclamation admitting Washington State to the Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 17, 1892</td>
<td>Clarke County Commissioners “have accepted the (new - 3rd) Court House” and order contractors paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 11, 1908</td>
<td>Spokane Portland and Seattle (SP&amp;S) Railway trains arrive in Clark County on newly completed line along Columbia River’s north bank</td>
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**Vancouver Public Library and Clark County Libraries**

- **December 31, 1909**: Vancouver Public Library opens in Carnegie grant-funded building on land donated by L.M. Hidden
- **February 14, 1917**: Interstate Bridge opens and ferry makes final run
- **February 7, 1918**: New spruce mill at Vancouver Barracks opens to support World War I effort
- **May 30, 1918**: Standifer wooden shipyard launches first ship, the Kineo
- **September 16, 1925**: Pearson Field dedicated at Vancouver Barracks honoring Lieutenant Alexander Pearson, an aviator in Pacific Coast’s first “flying circus” killed in speed practice September 2, 1925
- **December 23, 1925**: Governor Ronald Hartley signs bill correcting spelling of Clark County by dropping the ‘e’
- **January 1, 1929**: Vancouver celebrates end of Interstate Bridge tolls
- **October 2, 1933**: Clark Junior College opens in Hidden Building on Main Street
- **June 20, 1937**: Russian airplane pilot Valeri Chkalov, co-pilot Georgy Baidukov and navigator Alexander Belyakov land at Pearson Field after first transpolar flight (intended destination was San Francisco)
- **November 29, 1941**: New (4th) Clark County Courthouse dedicated by Governor Langlie
- **January 14, 1942**: Henry Kaiser announces plan to build Vancouver shipyard to support World War II effort (would employ 39,000 Clark County residents and swell population from 49,852 to 85,307 between 1940 and 1950)
- **April 1, 1943**: Clark County Libraries established, first rural library district in Washington State
- **April 28, 1950**: Vancouver Public Library and Clark County Libraries merge to form Fort Vancouver Regional Library District
- **July 5, 1955**: William Wineberg deeds 22 acres north of Vancouver to the County Fair board
- **August 13, 1955**: Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay dedicates Fort Vancouver site as National Monument
- **July 1, 1958**: New Interstate Bridge opens to traffic (and the reinstatement of tolls)
- **October 25, 1958**: New Clark College buildings and campus dedicated
- **May 24, 1964**: Clark County Historical Museum opens in Carnegie building after Vancouver Public Library moves to new Mill Plain building in 1963
- **November 1966**: Interstate Bridge at Vancouver becomes toll-free for the second time
- **December 15, 1982**: Interstate Highway 205 Glen Jackson Memorial Bridge opens, connecting eastern Clark County to Portland-metropolitan area
- **July 17, 2011**: Fort Vancouver Regional Library District opens new Vancouver Community Library branch at Evergreen & C Streets
What’s Your Handle
- Mother Joseph’s birth name was Esther Pariseau
- Hudson’s Bay employees named natural grazing areas starting with First Plain (nearest the river, later called Mill Plain), and included a Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Plain
- After a succession of names, Hayden Island was chosen to honor Vancouver mayor, Gay Hayden
- Arnada was once called Vancouver Heights
- Walnut Grove was once called Hobson
- Fisher’s Landing was once called Pumpkin Center
- Burton was once called Pucker Brush

Amazing Atmospheric Events
- Vancouver’s Professor Vilas parachuted from a balloon 800 feet above the city in 1891, barely missing a picket fence at 12th and Main Streets when landing
- Lincoln Beachey made the first powered flight to Clark County on August 3, 1905—in a dirigible
- In 1912, Silas Christofferson flew off the roof of the Multnomah Hotel in Portland Oregon in a Curtiss biplane, landing in Vancouver
- Charles Lindbergh flew over Pearson Airfield on September 14, 1927 and dropped a letter to the commander of the American Legion Post

Quick CURIous

Fantastic Firsts
- Richard Covington brought the first piano to Clark County in 1846
- In 1906, Thomas B. Clarke, Superintendent of the Deaf School, received Clark County’s first parking ticket
- The lights went out over Clark County at 10:30 pm on February 11, 1941 in the county’s first air raid drill of World War II

Government Greats
- The 1881 Vancouver City Council responded to complaints about noise pollution—in one block alone, 10 cows with bells were grazing (guess there was too much cowbell)
- President Calvin Coolidge authorized the minting of a United States half-dollar coin commemorating Fort Vancouver’s Centennial in 1925
- While stationed at Vancouver Barracks (before the Civil War and his presidency), an entrepreneurial U.S. Grant (who never actually lived in ‘The Grant House’) planned to sell a variety of local goods in San Francisco, including ice, potatoes, and chickens (he and his partners planned to buy all chickens within 20 miles of the barracks)
- Although dog racing was illegal in 1935, Clark County Commissioners allowed it at Bagley Downs in return for 3% of the profits

Rolling on the River
- The Columbia River froze over completely for the last time in 1929
- On August 1, 1931, the Great Milk War broke out in Clark County; farmers blockaded the Interstate Bridge and dumped 3,500 gallons of Portland milk in the Columbia River

Museum workers often stumble upon historical tidbits that don’t quite fit into an exhibit or publication...random facts that impress friends and family and come in handy when playing games or solving puzzles.
The ‘facts’ of history are not always clear. New evidence, interpretations and accounts are constantly being uncovered. Mistakes are easy to make, and even easier to perpetuate. Integrity, humility and honesty go a long way for historians in correcting these mistakes while preserving and presenting the past.

Mistaken Identity

**What was thought:** Many photographs donated to the museum come with little or no background information. Difficult-to-decipher writing and human memory are often used to identify the people, places and dates in the images. One example of a mislabeled photograph depicted a grain installation masquerading as an aluminum plant. For years, museum records listed it as the Vancouver ALCOA plant.

**What was learned:** In reality, this is a photograph of the Archer-Daniels-Midland Company’s grain elevator in Vancouver, Washington. The correction of this long-standing error was due to the knowledge of a diligent museum volunteer familiar with the location.

A Walk in the Park

**What was thought:** The origins of place names are easy to mistake, especially when the name is fairly common. It has been widely reported that Carter Park and the surrounding neighborhood were named after Joseph P. Carter, a local jeweler.

**What was learned:** Carter Park’s namesake is in fact Walter E. Carter, a prominent local storekeeper. Newspaper accounts from 1926 make it clear that Walter E. Carter donated several lots on 33rd between Columbia and Washington Streets for a children’s playground, also donating playground equipment for the park. The boundaries of Carter Park coincide with those listed in the newspaper accounts, which were discovered by a museum volunteer.

Jumping to Conclusions

**What was thought:** Sometimes architectural oddities spawn stories equally bizarre. A tale has been told for years that Charles Brown, a prominent Clark County banker who took his own life, did so by jumping from an oddly-placed ‘door to nowhere’ on his home’s second floor. Some in the community even refer to this home as the suicide house.

**What was learned:** Bank examiner J.W. Maxwell discovered that Charles Brown and cashier E.L. Canby “began making false entries in the ledgers [of the bank Brown managed] to cover up...bad transactions” in 1901. Shortly thereafter, Brown and Canby went to a field at the edge of town and took their own lives. It was reported that “the gun was still clenched in Brown’s hand” when his body was discovered.

Another Lew-Lew

**What was thought:** Some place name origins may seem obvious, but don’t be fooled. The Lewis River in north Clark County is thought by many to be named after famed explorer Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark expedition. It’s not a great leap of the imagination—nearby Lewis County and Fort Lewis are both named after the adventurer.

**What was learned:** The Lewis River was not named after the most famous Lewis in these parts. The border river was actually named after A. Lee Lewes, an area pioneer who homesteaded near the river that would later bear his name.
What motivated the woman in the front row to pose so perfectly, but with her back to the camera? Almost as perplexing is the apparent nonchalance of her fellow subjects. And what do the ribbons they’re wearing tell us? All we know about this image is that Peter Ondorff is the tall man in the back row.

A CURIOUS LENS

It’s been said that every picture speaks a thousand words. Figuring out what those words are trying to tell us can be a challenge. The museum is awash in images that make us wonder...who, what, where, when, and why.

Was this bear encountered in Clark County, or on a citizen’s vacation to Yellowstone? Whose brave hand is attempting to stroke the animal? Why does the car look like it’s sitting in a box? Inquiring minds want to know!

This mysterious woman’s burning gaze is the first thing most viewers see; but on closer examination...is she holding a mask or does her dress feature a mask-like pocket? Do the feet belong to her or to a creature protruding from her skirts? Even at high zoom, it is impossible to tell.
The Clark County Historical Museum extends our appreciation to all those who made this exhibit possible. We thank our sponsor, Stahancyk Kent and Hook Family Law and Estate Planning, our wonderful volunteers (you know who you are), and The Columbian for their contributions. Last but not least, we heartily thank YOU for your curiosity and support.