Our 2012 exhibit on the first women to hold various public positions was featured alongside of the Washington State Heritage exhibit: “Moving Forward, Looking Back”

**Minnie Burdon, M.D. (1909)**
Minnie Burdon (1878-1972) graduated from the University of Oregon Medical School in 1909 and returned home to practice in Anacortes until she became a World War I Army surgeon. She completed a residency in gynecology at the Mayo Clinic and returned to Anacortes for a few years, then practiced in Seattle. She retired from Seattle General in 1950 after a 40-year career that included volunteer care for unwed mothers.

**Berte M. Olson, Ferry Captain (1920)**
Tiny and tough Berte Olson (1882-1959) was the first woman to skipper a ferry on Puget Sound. In 1920 her family moved to Deception Pass and she won a bid on the Deception Pass ferry operation. After the Legislature approved a Deception Pass bridge in 1922, Olson’s lobbying postponed construction and kept her ferry operating six more years.

**Betty Lowman Carey, Union Fisherman (1939)**
Betty Lowman Carey (1914-2011) lived ahead of the curve. At 14 she became the youngest person to swim the Guemes Channel. In 1937, she was the first woman to row a canoe, solo, from Anacortes to Ketchikan, Alaska. After her return, she worked on a reef cutter; in 1939 she became the first woman admitted to the Fishermen’s Union of the Pacific and the first to sign on with a halibut schooner fishing the Gulf of Alaska.

**Betty Osborn McIntosh, City Editor (1951)**
When Betty Osborn McIntosh graduated from the University of Washington in 1950, most women journalists covered society news. Co-Publisher Wally Funk quickly hired her as the Anacortes American’s first female City Editor, but he made one mistake — bragging to his wife Mary Ann that hiring a woman saved money. She made her feelings crystal clear — and he never paid a man more than a woman again.

**Phyllis Lamb, Chamber of Commerce President**
Phyllis Ballock Swanberg Lamb was manager of the Sears store in 1969 when she became the first woman president of the Anacortes Chamber of Commerce — and, she believes, first in the state. She was invited to cut the ribbon on the Skyline airport, although Phil Burton did the honors, and was the first woman appointed to the Washington State Good Roads Association representing Skagit County.

**Port of Anacortes Commissioner**
Although Maria Petruch and Ann Erogan have run for the office, no woman has been elected as Port of Anacortes Commissioner — yet. Who will be the first? And, please be sure to let us know about any significant “First Women” of Anacortes that we’ve missed!
Nina Antonius, first women to serve on the Anacortes City Council, was sworn in Jan. 21, 1958 during the first council meeting under the council-city manager system.

Born March 1, 1898, she was active in Anacortes civic affairs of the 1950s, including the Community Development Study done with the University of Washington. Antonius and her husband Ivar owned and operated Antonius Garden and Flowers shop at Commercial and 4th Street.

“They never made a lot of money but they gave a lot to the community,” said Wallie Funk, who was co-publisher of the Anacortes American during that era.

Antonius was an active member of the Chamber of Commerce and involved in many significant city promotion efforts.

Eugene “Bud” Strom, who served with Antonius, said she was a capable council member interested in civic beautification. He said the four council members certified that night, including himself, supported initiatives such as street paving, and all were swept out of office at the next election by a slate of anti-paving candidates.

Antonius’ swearing in was greeted with little fanfare — just a photograph and a brief comment on the front page of the Jan. 22, 1958 Anacortes American. Funk said he did not consider a woman joining the council as shocking or surprising.

“I don’t think I thought much about that. She was qualified and she was running for council. It was a time when women were becoming more and more active,” he said.

“She was an extraordinary person. She had a very level-minded approach.”

— Wallie Funk on Nina Antonius

Bettye Bryant had served three years on the Anacortes City Council when she became the city’s first woman mayor. Under the council-city manager system, she was elected mayor by her fellow council members on Dec. 6, 1976.

“She was inspirational, how she became accomplished on her own, as a woman in a man’s world,” said Bryant’s son Eric Addison.

Bryant was born March 7, 1924 in Burlington. Her father, Joe Busha, was a Skagit County Commissioner.

“She kind of grew up in politics,” said Bryant’s daughter Debbie Macy.

Bryant’s children remember her as a single mother with four kids and two jobs. She moved to Anacortes in 1955, the year she and May Carpenter were hired by Scott O. Richards as the city’s first female real estate agents. Later she sold lots at Skyline by day and played in the piano bar in Skyline Marina at night.

“She was outgoing. She loved to entertain. She was a very independent businesswoman,” Macy said. She especially loved boating on her yacht, The Merry Widow. Above all, she loved her family, Macy and Addison said.

She opened Bryant’s Realty in 1964 and bought a Century 21 franchise in 1976. The Anacortes Chamber of Commerce honored her with the Distinguished Woman of the Community Award in 1980. She was a director of the Skagit County Board of Realtors and a member the board of directors for Skyline Beach Club.

Bryant died Nov. 13, 1990.

“I don’t know if I’m ready or if the city is ready for me,” Mrs. Bryant said following her election.

— Anacortes American, Dec. 8, 1976
Phyllis Lamb, Chamber of Commerce President

Phyllis Bullock-Swanberg Lamb was manager of the Sears store in 1969 when she became the first woman president of the Anacortes Chamber of Commerce — and, she believes, first in the state. She was invited to cut the ribbon on the Skyline airport, although Phil Burton did the honors, and was the first woman appointed to the Washington State Good Roads Association representing Skagit County.

Port of Anacortes Commissioner

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And, please be sure to let us know about any significant “First Women” of Anacortes that we’ve missed!
Bonnie Bowers joined the Anacortes Police Department in 2006 as a captain and became the city’s first female Police Chief in 2008.

A Skagit County native, Bowers graduated from Mount Vernon High School. She joined the Skagit County Sheriff’s Office in 1984 — its second woman deputy.

She was a corrections deputy, patrol deputy, field training officer and detective. She was promoted to sergeant, then traffic sergeant. Because women officers were uncommon, people occasionally called the Sheriff’s Office to verify her identity.

“When I was promoted to sergeant in 1994 I was the first woman patrol supervisor north of Snohomish County,” she said. “Today there are three woman patrol sergeants throughout Skagit County,” she said. In addition, there are four women officers at APD and 11 more throughout the county.

Sometimes being a woman helped diffuse volatile situations and other times it made no difference.

Bowers was police chief in La Conner in 2001-2005 as part of contracted services provided by the Sheriff’s Office. At the same time, she was responsible for the office’s accreditation and training programs.

“In my experience, good women officers are respected by their peers just as good male officers are. I think we now have seven good police chiefs in Washington State so again, it is becoming the norm as well,” she said.

“I worked very hard to make my gender a non-issue as far as promotions went. However, as a line deputy, if I needed to wield a little femininity to convince a drunk not to fight with me while I loaded them in my patrol car, I could do that too.”

After joining the Anacortes Police Department in 2006, Bonnie Bowers led efforts to attain APD’s accreditation and complete its procedure manual; and she enhanced officers’ training hours, including crisis intervention training.

She also has continued her professional growth. In 2009 she earned a bachelor’s degree in social science with a criminal justice emphasis at Washington State University and in 2010 she was selected to attend the FBI National Academy, a competitive and exclusive 16-week, graduate-level course in police administration.

Bowers said success is not only about the number of tickets written or crimes responded to— it’s also about crime prevention.

She has worked with many community groups to solve problems and reduce crime, earning a number of awards. She has been active with the United Way, Skagit Valley College Women’s Program, PTA, Edison Lutheran Church, Rotary Club and Secret Harbor. She is involved in early-learning and grade-level reading programs in Anacortes.

“There is a strong correlation between a child’s success in school and their chances of becoming involved in criminal activity. That said, I sometimes envy the officers in our department that actually get to go out and arrest criminals. That was always very satisfying!”
Many Anacortes women of distinction were featured in the 2008 exhibit titled: 

Colorful Characters & Local Lore
Betty Lowman Carey 1914–2011
ONE OF A KIND!

She rowed a canoe solo for 1300 miles, swam the Guemes Channel in twenty minutes, survived a shipwreck & became the first woman to crew on a halibut schooner (and not as a cook).

Betty Lowman was a powerhouse who would “drown myself before I’d let anybody say, ‘I told you a girl couldn’t do it.’”

Born in Anacortes, Betty was the oldest child followed by four brothers. She swam across Guemes Channel at age fourteen & later swam ten miles to Cypress. She flew down hills standing on her bicycle, swan-dived from yardarms & hoped to enter the Olympics as a discus thrower. As high school valedictorian, she talked about “Women in Athletics” despite disapproving townsfolk who “thought my topic most unsuitable.”

Her father, Ray Lowman, gave her a dug-out canoe when she turned 18. She named it Bifaboji after her brothers & decided to row to Alaska but Ray insisted on college first. In 1937, four days after graduating with a journalism degree from the University of Washington, Lowman rowed north.

Without telling Ray. He was in Alaska & upon hearing the news, he called on the Coast Guard to stop her. Too late. Betty was off on a 66-day adventure, at one point losing everything but the dugout & her sleeping bag. She fashioned a paddle from bark, finished the journey at Ketchikan & returned home to wild acclaim.

After her return, she worked on a reef netter & became the first woman admitted to the Fishermen’s Union of the Pacific. She broke another barrier in 1939 by signing on with a halibut schooner fishing the Gulf of Alaska. “She worked like a Trojan & wanted to do everything,” reported the skipper, who awarded her a “man’s share” of the catch.

In 1940, she was shipwrecked off Nova Scotia when the schooner she was crewing on hit a rock. She spent three days on an uninhabited island before being rescued by lobster fishermen, then hiked 143 miles to Halifax. Too proud to contact her family for money, she found work.

When an evening swim took her past destroyers in the military zone, Betty was accused of being a spy. Kicked out of Canada, she eventually made train fare home & met husband-to-be Neil Carey along the way.

After their two sons were grown, Betty & Neil moved to an isolated cove in the Queen Charlottes & lived a new adventure there for 20 years. They now live in Sandspit, B.C., about 100 miles from where Betty ended her remarkable canoe trip.
Berte Olson 1882-1959

UNsinkable Ferry Skipper

Berte Olson was a woman who took the bull by the horns. In her case, the bull was a ferry & the horns the honking kind.

The “Tugboat Annie of Hood’s Canal,” Olson was the first woman to skipper a ferry on Puget Sound. Tiny & tough, she ran two ferryboat companies between 1920 & 1950.

Born on Whidbey Island, Berte was the daughter of a ship’s carpenter & the oldest of fourteen children, many of whom became fishermen. But the closest Berte came to working by water was her job in a laundry.

Eventually she married the skipper of a small troller. While he fished in Alaska, Berte remained landbound with twin sons.

It must have grated. In 1920, when the family moved to Dewey Beach on Fidalgo, Berte saw a notice requesting bids for a Deception Pass ferry.

Berte bid. Berte scored. She fired off a telegram to Alaska: COME HOME STOP WE OWN FERRY LINE STOP LOVE STOP.

The couple took on a partner & towed two car-carrying scows from Yokoko Point on Fidalgo to Whidbey’s Hoyt’s Point. Berte got her operator’s license, cooked for the crews, helped with repairs & kept the books.

Soon the Olsons bought out their partner & purchased a double-ender big enough to carry twelve Model Ts. Son Ivan says the family ferried lots of hearse across the pass. An epidemic? “They were full of moonshine!”

Fifty cents a car, ten cents a passenger. It added up to a tidy living, secure but for one thing: bridges.

In 1929, the Legislature voted unanimously for a Deception Pass bridge. The vote might have deterred a lesser woman from heading to Olympia but not Berte. “Mother was a talker,” says Ivan. “She’d go right to the Governor. She’d pull strings.”

Berte convinced Gov. Hartley to veto the bill & for six more years her ferry chugged across Deception Pass. But in 1933, under a new governor, the legislation passed.

The bridge opened in 1935, the Olsons divorced & Berte left Fidalgo. Broke, she convinced Captain Peabody of the Blackball Line to stake her purchase of the Port Gamble-Shine run in Hood’s Canal. She operated & captained that run until 1950.

State Senator Paul Laverda once told Ivan he couldn’t understand how Berte “could go down to Olympia with no money & stop the bridge.” Others wondered how a slip of a woman held her own & more in a man’s world.

For Ivan, it’s simple: “Mother could do miracles.”
Barbara Amerman 1905-1980

Mrs. Red Cross

Color doesn’t always come in bold hues. Whatever
Barbara Amerman lacked in flash, she made up for with a
saintly spirit that brightens the memories of those who knew her.

“She was probably the most compassionate individual I have
ever known. She didn’t have a car, but that didn’t stop her from
marching all over town making sure people got the things they
needed,” recalls Jim Funk. His brother Wallace dubs her an “Angel
of Mercy. All you had to do to start a fund drive was to tell her a
sad story.”

Amerman became head of the local Red Cross during WWII.
Walking over a mile to & from work every day, she ran the
chapter for thirty years, retiring in 1975.

Under her guidance, the Anacortes Red Cross moved beyond military &
disaster assistance to offer such programs as first aid & homemaking classes,
quilts for the needy, holiday cheer programs & swim lessons at Lake Erie.

A fixture for years outside the Post Office
selling poppies for wounded vets, Amerman
created an apartment in her home for service
families in need. After the war, it served as a
haven for the homeless.

Angels of Mercy don’t take holidays &
“Mrs. Red Cross” was no exception. “One
Christmas night she remarked that it was the
first holiday that she had not received an
emergency phone call,” recalls daughter
Sally Scott. “What a surprise to her to
learn that her phone was out of
order!”

One of Amerman’s
constant worries was
whether or not
youngsters had decent
shoes. She created the
Shoe Fund, bringing
children into the store
herself to make sure
they were properly
fitted.

Children were the
main beneficiaries of the Christmas Cheer program, which
provided baskets of food, clothes & toys. It was a program
Amerman was so devoted to that when she developed cancer, she begged
her doctor to postpone her operation until after the holidays.

Neighbor Mary Luvera said “She went way beyond the call of duty. If
there was a needy family & the Red Cross funds were all gone, she would
reach into her own pocket & that was something she could ill afford to do.”

Amerman received no compensation
from the National Red Cross but was paid
from local fund drives. “Every time we tried
to raise her salary, she refused the raise
because she felt the community needed it
more,” says Jim Funk. “You don’t find
many people like that in the world.”

Color Barbara Amerman a blessing.
Believing “one can’t be original & proper,” Bubbles ditched decorum for a life lived on her own terms. She dropped one fiancé after a long engagement, married three others & barnstormed local towns as a scantily-dressed dancer.

Born in North Dakota, she was handed off to her namesake grandmother. The pair came to Anacortes about 1909, where the older Henrietta married & settled at 9th Street & M Avenue.

Grandma was something of a free spirit herself. She “taught me how to think,” & bought Bubbles her first canoe, allowing the girl to paddle alone & camp on nearby islands. Bubbles “would sit there happily, listening to the owls & thinking how different I was from the other girls with their Eastern Star mothers who constantly told them to cross their ankles & be little ladies.”

She’d paddle her dragon-painted canoe with dog in bow, gun across lap & often a buck athwartships. Throughout her life she felt at home in the wilderness, camping & hunting alone on islands from here to Alaska.

Her grandmother bought land on Guemes Island’s West Beach & there Bubbles built her first cabin at age sixteen. After taking a hatchet to booty left on her beach by rumrunners, she found the cabin burnt to the ground in revenge. Rumor has it she strapped on pistols & went after the thugs, but she later said her grandmother waylaid her with gifts of a fur coat & bear gun.

Bubbles built other homes at the site, wonderlands formed from a fertile imagination & beachcombed treasures. Out of driftwood, shells, skulls, cement & more arose a host of bizarre beings that included two dragons at her door. Litton Lodge’s main room was molded from cement so cushions & rugs could be removed & dirt hosed down a central drain.

Childless, Bubbles opened heart & home to strays, kids from broken homes & others. She threw parties people long remembered & posted signs in her house on how to be a good guest.

A gifted artist, Bubbles cartooned her escapades, sewed quilts & crafted exotic costumes. While still a young woman she toured locally as a magician’s assistant and Oriental dancer, “Ming Toy.” When an aunt caught the show, she ordered her niece to “put on some clothes & come home!”

There’s no consensus on why Henrietta was called “Bubbles.” In later years, she insisted it was “One Bubble,” & that’s how it is on her gravestone. There are no dates on the stone, which somehow seems appropriate. Bubbles, singular or plural, was timeless.
At age 76, Julia Haroldson dreamed of trading land for a green convertible & driving to Crater Lake with the top down.

She was two when she came from Iowa to the island where Anacortes was still just a glint in Amos Bowman’s eye. After a year working a farm, the family left for Oregon. They returned when Julia was six & Amos had named his town.

In 1882, the Haroldsons bought a forty-acre farm at Alexander Beach. “Until 1890 there wasn’t much to the town itself,” she later mused. “But then came the railroads & buildings sprang up like mushrooms after a summer rain.”

Julia thrived in her wild surroundings. She raced her mustang along the shore against Indian friends & “I generally won, too.” She wandered the forests with an eye towards a meal. “I never came home without something,” she said. “When I was eleven years old, I commenced to shoot a gun – mine was the first breach-loading, double-barreled shotgun on the island.”

Relative Erwin Knapp remembers that Julia lived away from the farm at one point but had to return to “take care of the g-damn cows.” She’d sometimes let the cattle feed along the road, herding them home later with her Model A pickup. “You could tell she headed cows with it because of the dents in the fenders & holes in the radiator.”

After her parents died, Julia carried on at the farm alone. To the end she used kerosene lamps, fetched wood for the stoves & drew water from a well. The cows were gone but she still raised chickens & rose at 6:00 AM to attend to chores.

Sadly, in later years, young people regularly drove onto her property & tormented the elderly woman. One night she finally aimed her 30-30 carbine at a car & wounded two men. They sped to the hospital & Julia was taken to jail. In a newspaper report, neighbors spoke in her favor & authorities admonished the troublemakers.

It’s unknown if formal charges were pressed, but two years later Julia was hoping to sell off a bit of the farm & blow down to Oregon in that big green convertible. Maybe she did it, or maybe she settled for the memory of racing a mustang along a wild Fidalgo shore.
Tol Stola ~1828-1919
CAROLINE “GRANDMA” KAVANAUGH

She was an Indian princess who married the nephew of the president of the Confederacy & later was the first sheriff of Whatcom County.

Accounts vary as to when she was born, what tribe she belonged to & when she arrived on Fidalgo.

Tol Stola may have been the granddaughter of a Vancouver Island chieftain who came to Fidalgo in 1844 to conquer the Swinomish. The invading braves were killed, the battle lost & little Tol Stola was taken into the Swinomish tribe.

Or...she was born on Fidalgo, descended from a line of Swinomish chiefs. Her mother died & her father placed Tol Stola with relatives or friends on Bellingham Bay. A white woman eventually took the girl into her home & gave her a Catholic upbringing. It was there she met Lieutenant Samuel Davis, nephew of Jefferson Davis.

Renowned for her beauty, grace & smarts, Tol Stola also had a playful streak. One account notes that she would run from Davis when he tried to kiss her & swim to an island half a mile away, leaving him to beg her return.

That spirit continued to shine over the years. Into old age Tol Stola regularly walked six miles to the Catholic Church on the Swinomish Reservation. One day she met a grandson on his motorcycle & shocked him when “without the least hesitation, she climbed up on the back seat & with seeming great enjoyment, rode the white man's gas pony to her home.”

After Davis & Tol Stola married, they lived at Fort Bellingham & had a son, Samuel (killed years later in a steamboat explosion). With the start of the Civil War, Davis left home to enlist.

He never returned. Tol Stola eventually married Sheriff James Kavanaugh, who called her “Caroline,” & they established a farm at March's Point in 1865.

Kavanaugh died around 1885 & Tol Stola continued on at the homestead. As she aged, the tiny woman with hair that reached almost to the ground strongly influenced her tribe. One time, while she was ill in bed, an old friend died & was buried without Tol Stola’s knowledge. The next day she rode a horse to the reservation & ordered the body exhumed for a second funeral service.

In a 1913 interview, Tol Stola, also known then as “Grandma Kavanaugh,” recalled the various paths she’d taken, from wild Indian girl to a Lieutenant’s pampered wife to hard-working farm wife.

“Isn’t life a funny state of affairs?” she marveled.
Minnie Burdon ~1878-1972
PIONEERING WOMAN DOCTOR

When Minnie Burdon retired as Seattle General’s chief of staff a newspaper announced: “Woman Doctor Retires.” No paper today would run such a headline, but back in Burdon’s time, woman doctors were as rare as hen’s teeth.

That’s an apt cliché in this case, since it was chickens who helped Burdon become a doctor. Or so the story goes.

Burdon’s parents insisted medicine was no career for a female. But that was before they left Minnie & her siblings alone for a day at their March’s Point farm. The children fed pork rinds to the chickens, which caused several to keel over with plugged craws. Minnie slit their throats, extracted the rinds, sewed them back up, saved the flock & so dissolved at least her father’s objections to her career choice.

In 1909, Burdon graduated from the University of Oregon Medical School. After completing her internship, she returned to Anacortes to practice & then went into the army during WWI to serve as a surgeon anesthetist.

One relative remembers that when Burdon first began her practice, a man entered her office & tried to intimidate her by exposing himself. After a glance she coolly noted “Well, there’s nothing out of the ordinary but that will be five dollars.”

Burdon completed a residency in gynecology at the Mayo Clinic & then returned to Anacortes to practice for several years & care for her parents.

After leaving Anacortes, she practiced at Seattle General, retiring in 1950 after a forty-year career that included volunteering her services to a home for unwed mothers.

Burdon never married, but may have been engaged at one time to a man who died before they could wed. Childless herself, she helped raise & educate her sister’s children.

Great-nieces Nancy Mathews & Joan Granville remember visits from their formidable-looking aunt, who arrived in sensible heels & a back brace that gave her a poker-straight stance. Aunt Minnie would “position her cosmetics very precisely on the dresser & fastidiously consign her folded garments to the drawers” before scooping the girls into her lap.

Another descendant recalls taking the doctor to visit friends on Sinclair Island. While out in a 14-foot open boat, wind billowing her skirts, an orca pod surfaced nearby. The skipper suggested a hasty retreat but to his surprise Burdon urged, “Can’t we get closer?”

Plugged craws, feisty patients, orca pods…there obviously wasn’t much that fazed Dr. Minnie Burdon.