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Newsletter: Dottie Chandler
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Here we are again, a new year. It's January, named for the Roman God Janus. The God of beginnings and endings, of doorways and transitions. Fittingly, this January 2026 represents a transition for me and SVGS as I take on the role of President of your society. Following Margie Wilson and Barb Johnson in this office is a tall task, but I hope to build on their excellent example and steer SVGS forward into the future. Joining me in this transition is Mitch Huffman who takes on the role of Treasurer, so aptly filled for many years by Patty Gowler. I'm sure Mitch will watch our pennies with an eagle eye. Together with our returning Officers, Vice President Pat Hoyrup and Secretary Rene Vance, we look forward to a successful 2026.

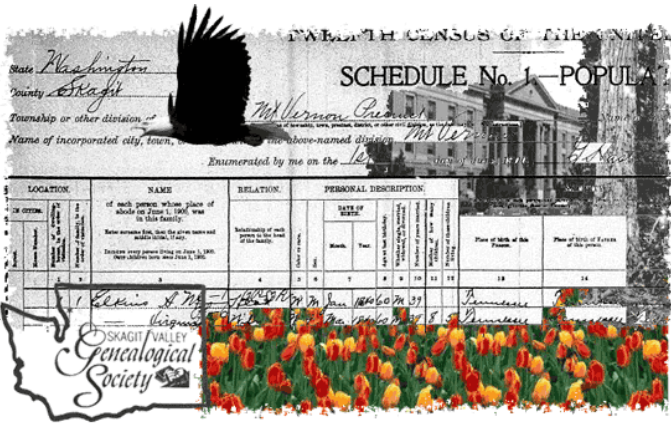
What does success look like for SVGS? You can help answer that question by joining us at the SVGS Board Retreat on Saturday January 31, 2026, from 10am-2pm at the Family Search Library at 1700 E. Hazel Street in Mount Vernon. This is your opportunity to help shape the future of SVGS. We want and need your ideas and participation to make SVGS successful.

If success is measured in great speakers, Pat Hoyrup got the year started off right by booking our January program "United Empire Loyalists" with Brian McConnell. It was a fascinating talk, giving us a look at the American Revolutionary period from the perspective of the proud loyal colonists who ended up as refugees in Canada. In February we will explore family history research resources available at the Washington State Library. The Washington State Library has been adversely impacted by budget cuts but still holds collections of interest to family researchers.

For me, success is seeing people connect, whether it is in person or over Zoom. Let's face it, genealogy is seen as a solo pursuit. Hours spent alone, squinting at computer screens or pouring over dusty books, or microfilms in libraries. Seeing smiling faces at a Zoom meeting, or better yet in person, brings life to our chosen hobby. Our 2nd Tuesday meetings provide members with an opportunity to learn new research skills or sharpen existing ones. More importantly, it's a second monthly opportunity to gather, to laugh, and to turn the solitary hobby of genealogy into an avenue for social connection.

Success awaits; it is up to all of us to define it and make it happen. So, on to 2026! Janus welcomes you through the doorway! Come join SVGS, make that social connection. Come learn, laugh and yes, commiserate over missing ancestors and seemingly impenetrable brick walls. Individually we might find a few branches of the family tree, but together we can find the forest of connections that bind us all. Happy New Year,

Robin Engel,
President, SVGS



SVGS Board of Directors 2026

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 president@skagitvalleygenealogy.org

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 vicepresident@skagitvalleygenealogy.org

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 Sylvia Ammons

Publications:

Publications: Robin Engel
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Special Committees

Nominating: **OPEN**

Check out our redesigned web page at
skagitvalleygenealogy.org

Comb Binding ...

- For members, The society owns a comb binding machine. If you call Dan Royal @ 360-826-6141 he will make arrangements to bind your pages into a book for you. Cost is: \$1.00 per book to cover supplies.

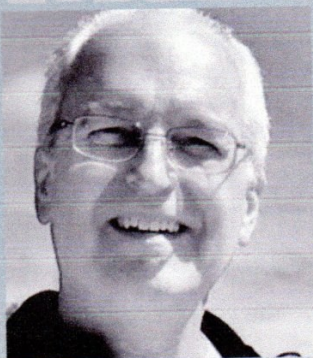
Burlington Public Library

820 E Washington Ave
 Burlington, WA 98233
 Phone (360) 755-0760
 Email:
 library@ci.burlington.wa.us



The Equality Colony of Skagit County

Saturday March 14, 2026



**Guest Speaker:
In Person**

Robert Burns

Author:

*Rebels in the Wild: The Equality
Colony and the Taming of
American Capitalism*

**1:00PM-3:00PM
BURLINGTON LIBRARY**

Conference Room

Hybrid Meeting

Attend in Person or via Zoom

EVERYONE WELCOME

Email

**info@skagitvalleygenealogy.org
for a Zoom link**

*Free, Fun
Giveaways*



**Skagit Valley Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 192 Burlington WA 98233
info@skagitvalleygenealogy.org
skagitvalleygenealogy.org**

<https://skagitvalleygenealogy.org/>



**Burlington
Public Library**

**820 E. WASHINGTON AVENUE
BURLINGTON WA 98233
burlingtonwa.gov/library
360.755.0760**



HATCHED, MATCHED & DISPATCHED

Chasing Ancestors Through US Vital Records

Saturday April 11, 2026



Guest Speaker:
Colette Hokanson
FamilySearch Library
Researcher

1:00PM-3:00PM

BURLINGTON LIBRARY

Conference Room

Hybrid Meeting

Attend in Person or via Zoom

Email info@skagitvalleygenealogy.org for a Zoom link

EVERYONE WELCOME

Free, Fun Giveaways



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820 E. Washington Avenue
Burlington WA 98233
burlingtonwa.gov/library
360.755-0760

History of Bow, Washington

Bow was originally known as Brownsville, after William J. Brown, who homesteaded the townsite in 1869. The advent of the railroad resulted in a population boom and the need for a post office. Apparently inspired by the growth brought by the railroad, Brown suggested the new name of Bow, after the large railway station in London, England, which in turn was named for the bow or poplar tree. Although this is the most common belief, there are some who believe it was named after homesteader James T. Bow.

An alternate story claims that the settlement is named for a Norwegian immigrant family that settled in that area in the 1890s.¹ Their last name was Boe.



SVGS Genealogy Interest Group
2nd Tuesdays, 11am-1pm
 Burlington Public Library Conference Room
Topics Vary Depending on Group's Interests
 plus, research in small groups.
Come join us!



What kind of spells do leprechauns use?

Lucky charms.

Why did the leprechaun go outside?

To sit on his paddy-o.

What do you get when two leprechauns have a conversation?

A lot of small talk.

Why do so many leprechauns love to garden?

Because they have green thumbs.

How can you tell if a leprechaun likes your joke?

He's Dublin over with laughter!

MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE DUE NOW!

Just a friendly reminder that dues are going to be due soon for the Skagit Valley Genealogical Society. **Our year goes from Jan. 1st through Dec. 31st.** Dues this year have raised to \$20.00 for single membership and \$25.00 for family member

20 Ways Your Ancestors Survived Snowstorms That Would Seem Insane Today

Your Great-great-grandparents didn't check weather apps. They had grit and some absolutely unhinged survival tactics.

We complain when the power flickers for twenty minutes. Meanwhile, our ancestors were tunneling through 25-foot snowdrifts, eating bark and using pig body for heats as a personal furnace.

The stories buried in historical records aren't just fascinating—they're a testament to the wild resilience running through your bloodline.

Here are 20 ways your ancestors outlasted brutal winters.

1. They entered their homes through second story windows.

In 1717, New England got hammered by four back-to-back storms. Snow piled five-six feet deep on level ground. Drifts swallowed entire houses up to the third story. So families climbed out of upstairs windows just to see daylight. The Reverend Cotton Mather recorded in his diary that "all communication between houses and farms ceased," and homes were identifiable only by thin curls of smoke rising from holes in the snowbanks.

2. They dug tunnels through the snow to feed their animals.

When drifts buried the first floor, your ancestors didn't wait for a thaw. They grabbed shovels and carved tunnels from their doors to the barn. Underground snow highways—just to keep the livestock alive. Contemporary accounts from the 1717 Great Snow describe entire networks of these passages connecting homes to outbuildings.

3. They built houses out of dirt (and it actually worked).

No trees on the Great Plains meant no lumber, so homesteaders got creative. They sliced the prairie itself into three-foot strips of sod and stacked it into walls 2-3 foot thick. These "soddies" looked primitive, dirt floors, bugs dropping from the ceiling. Rain turning the roof into a mud waterfall. While outside temps plunged to -40 degrees F, the thermal mass of these earthen walls kept families alive with barely any fuel. Historical records show settlers burned twisted hay or dried buffalo chips just to keep the chill off.

4. They designed chimneys as giant heat batteries.

Colonial homes weren't just shelters, they were thermal engineering projects. The massive central chimney often built from stone or brick acted as a heat battery. It absorbed warmth from the fire all day, then radiated it slowly into surrounding rooms through the night. During extreme cold snaps, families would abandon outer rooms entirely. They closed off parlors and unheated bedchambers, retreating to the kitchen or "keeping room" to huddle within the fire radius. Historical housing studies describe how ambient temperatures just a few feet from the hearth could drop below freezing.

5. They slept in giant family piles.

When temperatures dropped, entire families crammed into one bed. Kids, parents, sometimes even household help, all piled together under every blanket in the house. They'd heat rocks or bricks by the fire, wrap them in cloth and tuck them under the covers. Brass pans filled with hot coals got slid between the sheets—devices called "bed warmers" that were standard household equipment. Body heat was the original central heating.

6. A teenage teacher turned her students into a human chain.

January 12, 1888. The morning broke unseasonably warm across the Dakotas and Nebraska. Kids walked to school in light jackets. Farmers headed into town without coats. Then the sky turned black. A powerful cold front screamed down from Canada at 60 miles per hour. According to meteorological records, temps dropped 100 degrees Fahrenheit in 24 hours. Visibility hit zero instantly. Survivors described it as "dark as a cellar." In a tiny Nebraska schoolhouse in Mira Valley, 19 year old teacher Minnie Freeman watched the gale-force winds tear the roof clean off. She had 13 students, no visibility, and no shelter. She didn't have a rope, but she had grit. She organized the children into a tight group, linked them arm-in-arm and led them three quarters of a mile through the whiteout. She carried the youngest in her arms, walking directly into the wind the entire way. Every child survived. Minnie became known as the "Fearless Maid" and a national hero. Songs were written about her. The legend grew so large that later tellings added dramatic details like rope.

7. They crawled on their hands and knees to stay alive.

During that same 1888 blizzard, later called the Schoolchildren's Blizzard. Some survivors discovered a brutal truth: standing up could get you lost forever. The wind was so fierce at full height that people couldn't see, couldn't breathe, couldn't orient themselves. So they dropped down. Historical accounts document that Will

Allen crawled on his hands and knees to find his brother Walter. Frank Carney, a telegraph operator, survived by crawling along the railroad tracks, feeling the iron rails with his hands to guide him to safety. Standing meant disorientation, crawling meant survival.

These are a few of the ways our ancestors survived snowstorms. If you want to read more go to genealogy explained by Marc McDermott. These are excerpt from his article. Here is another article from him.

Why Your Ancestor's Age Changes in Every Document (And No, It's Not Just Bad Handwriting)

Your great-great-grandfather was 4 years old in 1860. Then he was 10 in 1870. By 1880, he was somehow only 16. Wait, what? If you've done any genealogy research, you've hit this wall. Your ancestor's age bounces around like a pinball between census records, death certificates, and gravestones. You assume you've got the wrong person. Or perhaps—and let's be honest, this is where most of us land—our ancestors were just really, really bad at math. Here's the truth that'll blow your mind: They weren't confused. Birthdays weren't celebrated among regular folks in the 1800s. Those parties were reserved for kings, queens, the occasional rich eccentric—not your average farmer or factory worker. For everyone else? Your birthday was irrelevant. Age was tracked by stories, not dates. "Let's see... little Susie was born in the fall after Jimmy arrived, and Jimmy was born the year the war ended, so that makes her about... seven? Maybe eight?" This isn't ignorance. It's a completely different way of experiencing time.

People lived in a world of seasons and narratives, not spreadsheets and calendars. When a census taker showed up demanding a specific number, your ancestor had to translate their life story into a digit. That translation was imprecise by design. And here's the kicker: The 1910 U.S. Census actually warned census takers about this. The official instructions told enumerators to double-check any age ending in 0 or 5 because people rounded their ages like we round our weight at the doctor's office. The government knew this was happening everywhere.

You know what most Americans didn't have in 1880? A birth certificate. England started requiring them nationally in 1837. Smart move, England. Meanwhile, the United States took its sweet time, rolling out birth registration state by state like the world's slowest software update. Massachusetts started in 1841. New York waited until 1881—and even then didn't seriously enforce it until 1913. Georgia didn't get on board until 1919. The entire system wasn't standardized nationwide until the 1930s. Your ancestors born in the 1800s had nothing to prove when they were born except family testimony, a Bible entry, or their own fuzzy memory. When asked their age, they were basically winging it.

Your Ancestors Lied on Purpose (And They Had Good Reasons)

Let me tell you about the most ruthless form of identity fraud in the 1800s: parents altering their family Bible. Child labor laws in the late 1800s said kids couldn't work in factories below certain ages. But factory wages—even tiny ones—kept families from starving. So when inspectors came around, parents lied. These weren't criminals. They were desperate parents doing what they had to do to survive. But child labor wasn't the only reason people lied about age.

Boys wanted to enlist, men wanted to dodge the draft, couples wanted to avoid scandal and old people wanted pensions.

For Enslaved People, Age Was a Tool of Dehumanization. Frederick Douglass didn't know his birthday. He wrote that enslavers deliberately kept this information from enslaved people, wanting them to "know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs." Age was a form of property. And like everything else about an enslaved person, it belonged to their owner.

Here's what changed everything: factories, wars, and pensions. The modern state needed to sort people. It needed to know who could work, who could fight, who qualified for benefits, and who should be in school. Age became the sorting mechanism. So next time you're staring at three different ages for the same person, don't just sigh and split the difference. Ask yourself: *What were they trying to do? What world were they living in?* That's where the real story lives.

2026 Membership Renewal Statement

Dear SVGS Member,

Don't miss out on the helpful benefits of being an active SVGS member in 2025. Members receive monthly meeting Zoom links, speaker's notes/handouts, a weekly genealogy news digest sent to your email inbox on upcoming genealogy presentations, skill-building research tips and resources, webinars, workshops, genealogy seminars, and other helpful genealogy news. Plus, members receive the SVGS quarterly, digital newsletter. Your dues make SVGS' monthly educational programs by genealogy experts possible. Your membership dues will keep you in the loop as to upcoming presentations and help make them happen!

If you have been helped in your family history research by SVGS' programs and/or volunteers, then renewing your dues is the perfect way to "pay it forward" so that SVGS may continue to help other researchers learn valuable skills and break through research challenges. If you have already renewed your dues – Thank you! If not, please use the mail in form below – or pay online:

www.skagitvalleygenealogy.org/membership today!

Detach below the dotted line and return the bottom portion with your check.

----- Mail your completed form with your check before your dues expire on the 2nd Saturday in March 2026 to:

Skagit Valley Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 192, Burlington, WA 98233-0192

NAME: _____ EMAIL: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____ PHONE: _____

___ RENEWAL ___ NEW MEMBER ___ \$20 INDIVIDUAL ___ \$25 FAMILY (at Same Address)

Your contact information is not shared or published. It is solely used for official SVGS communications.

YOU CAN ALSO RENEW ONLINE WITH PAYPAL OR CREDIT CARD IN THE MEMBERSHIP TAB on SVGS' WEBSITE:

www.skagitvalleygenealogy.org/membership

Please tell us a bit about your family research interests:

I am researching in: (list the US states or countries): _____

Genealogy topics I'd like to learn about are: _____

I consider myself to be at the research skill level of a: ___ Beginner ___ Intermediate ___ Advanced ___ Not Sure

Your feedback for SVGS: _____

I would like to get more involved with SkVGS. Please: ___ Call me ___ Email me ___ Sorry, not at this time.

Thank you so much for your continued support of your genealogy society.

**SKAGIT VALLEY
Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 192 Burlington, WA 98233-0192**

Address Correction Requested