

The ARCHIVE

QUARTERLY OF THE GRESHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY
SUMMER 2025



410 N Main Ave ♦ PO Box 65 ♦ Gresham, OR 97030 ♦ (503) 661-0347 ♦ info@greshamhistorical.org

Carnival area, or Midway, of the Multnomah County Fair in Gresham, late 1940s or early 1950s.
GHS 2010.015.0026, donated by Margaret Splawn



See pg. 6-7



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AT THE MUSEUM

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jul. 12, 10am & 1pm Downtown Gresham Walking Tour

This 1.5 hour walking tour will explore several eras of local architecture. See pg. 4 for details.

Jul. 17, 4-8pm Third Thursday in Downtown Gresham

Browse vendor booths and enjoy fresh food on Main Avenue before visiting the museum for special late hours.

Jul. 20, 12pm Historic Cemeteries Tour

Join us for a 1-hour walking tour of three historic burial grounds. See pg. 4 for details.

Jul. 19, 9am-5pm DIY Tie Dye Fundraiser

Visit us during the Festival of Arts to make some wearable art of your own! See pg. 4.

Jul. 26, 5-6pm History Talk: Oregon's Carnegie Libraries

A lecture by Darrell Jabin, "Oregon's Traveling Historian." \$5 per person; members free.

Aug. 16, 12pm Cemetery Tree Walk

This slightly longer version of our Cemetery Tour includes significant trees. See pg. 4.

Aug. 21, 4-8pm Third Thursday in Downtown Gresham

Browse vendor booths and enjoy fresh food on Main Avenue before visiting the museum for special late hours.

Aug. 30, 5-6pm History Talk: Downtown Gresham Architecture

Learn about several eras of architecture in Gresham. \$5 per person; members free.

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Grants Received for Building Work, Historic Guidebook

GHS is proud to announce a series of upcoming grant projects set for 2025-2027.

The largest of these is a round of repairs and upgrades to the Zion Church, a historic building which GHS owns and

leases to Spinellas Restaurant. The Oregon Heritage Commission has awarded the prestigious Oregon Main Street Grant in the amount of \$243,000 to fund this project, which will include repairs to the building's brick walls and the addition of an exterior elevator to make the second floor accessible to wheelchair users. We will be working closely with the Historic Downtown Gresham Association, the grant awardee, over the 2025-2027 term of the grant.

Two grants totaling \$29,255 from Travel Oregon via Gresham Area Chamber of Commerce will boost the museum's visibility and tourism profile. The first of these grants will fund lighting upgrades to gallery display cases and a new outdoor sign at the corner of Main and 4th. New LED lights will replace a system of tube lights that volunteers installed in the 1990s, freshening exhibits and saving energy for years to come.

The second Travel Oregon grant will fund the writing and publication of a history guidebook to Gresham, set for release in September 2026. The guidebook will include trivia, self-guided tours, and short essays on local history.

Finally, GHS has received the City of Gresham Community Enhancement Grant for \$7,500 to remove infestations of squirrels and starlings that have plagued the attic and crawl spaces for several years. The funds will support pest removal and repair of about 14 holes around the building.

These projects will boost the museum's visibility and profile.



Zion Church in 2023. Photo by Tameric Photography.

AT THE MUSEUM

REMEMBERING UTAHNA KERR

The Gresham Historical Society has lost one of its founders, leaders, volunteers, and steadfast advocates in Utahna Kerr, who died on March 4, 2025 at the age of 93.

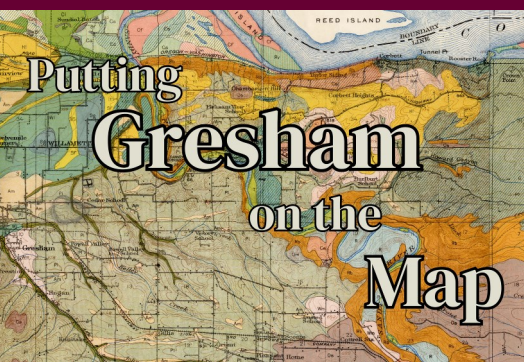
Utahna first became involved with the historical society before its actual founding, when community leaders were first discussing how to bring a local history flavor to the US Bicentennial celebration in 1976. Utahna sewed a historical costume and wore it at Bicentennial events to promote the new Gresham Historical Society. (The costume is now on display in our featured exhibit.)

Though she grew up on a ranch in Preston, Idaho, Utahna loved her adopted city, raising four girls with her husband Larry in their home on Gresham Butte. For years, she and Larry traveled to local schools and gave history talks, bringing historical objects to show how children lived in the 1800s. They shared local heritage with generations of Gresham-area schoolchildren.

Utahna was part of the team that researched and wrote *Gresham: Stories of Our Past*, a two-volume book of local history. Her curiosity and knowledge contributed significantly to the book's success, and it continues to be the definitive guide to local history.

As a member of the board of directors since the 1980s, Utahna helped guide GHS through difficult times, including several changes in leadership. During this time, she worked hard to restore the historic Bethel Baptist Church and endured its heartbreaking loss to arson fire. She also helped raise funds to purchase the Gresham Carnegie Library and open it as the Gresham History Museum. A retired ER nurse, she remained even-keeled, optimistic, and reliable through times of joy and hardship.

Utahna was a volunteer wrangler and member of the BZBs, a group of volunteers who ran the museum on a daily basis in the 1990s and 2000s. As a BZB, she registered artifacts and documents, but most importantly, she shared her love of Gresham with visitors. Utahna was compassionate, loving, and intelligent, making all who entered the museum feel they belonged here. While we deeply miss Utahna, her legacy will live on in her achievements and the lives she touched.



EXHIBITS ON VIEW

Putting Gresham on the Map features maps from our archives. These historic documents could show you how to get around, where to shop, what to

plant in your garden, and why you should move to Gresham—plus much more. Learn more about what different types of maps can tell you about the world around us and why cartography remains important in the age of satellites and GPS.

Ever wonder what life was like in **Gresham in the 60s and 70s**? Our featured exhibit explores business, politics, and culture in Gresham at a time of historic change. From the Street of Dreams to Mt. Hood Community College, many forces converged on Gresham, defining what the city would become. Incorporating objects, photos, oral history, and more, this exhibit sheds light on an important era in our history.

Dates: Jan. 22–
Nov. 15, 2025



AT THE MUSEUM



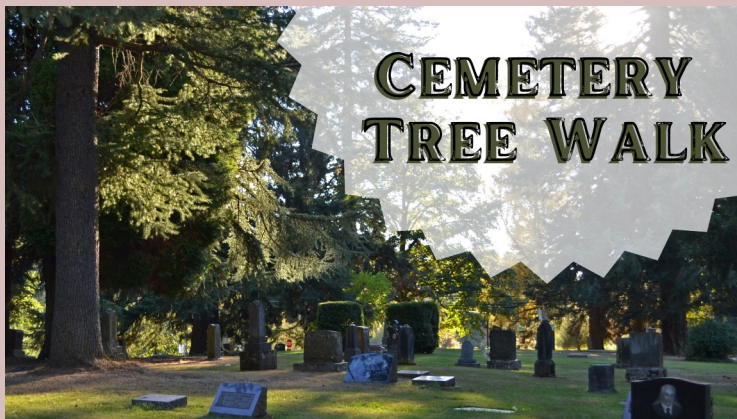
June 19, 2025 ✦ 9am-5pm ✦ Gresham Historical Society

Our annual **DIY Tie Dye** fundraiser is coming up! Get a little color in your life while supporting community history. All materials are provided, but you can bring your own (all cotton) shirt for a discount.

Other things to note:

Tie dying can get messy! We supply gloves and will keep the hose running, but consider wearing old clothes to this event.

The process takes about 20 minutes. You'll bring your creation home in a sealed plastic bag, and it should remain bagged for 24-48 hours before you rinse the dye out.



Free cemetery tours are back! This year, we're offering both the standard one-hour tour and a longer walk that will also explore significant trees within the cemeteries. All tours will continue to meet in the east lot of West Gresham Elementary, 330 W Powell Blvd. The terrain is rolling lawn.

Upcoming Tour Dates

7/20, 12-1 - Cemetery Tour

8/16, 12-1:30 - Cemetery Tree Tour

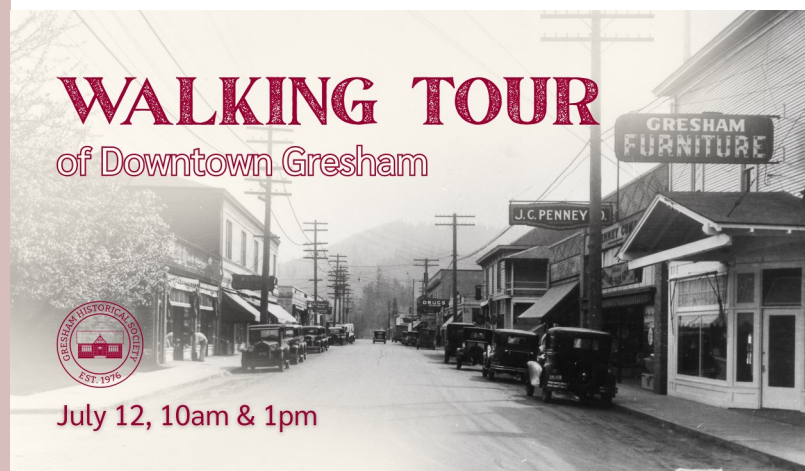
9/13, 12-1 - Cemetery Tour

10/11, 12-1:30 - Cemetery Tree Tour

Learn more about the history all around us on this easy, one-hour walking tour of Downtown Gresham. We'll be talking about commercial and residential buildings from various eras of Gresham's development and how these buildings still play an important role in our community. Stops will include the Zion Church, M&M Restaurant, Amiton Furniture, and of course, the Gresham Carnegie Library. Bring your burning questions!

The tour will begin and end in front of the Gresham Historical Society. It lasts about 1.5 hours.

7/12, 10am and 1pm



WALKING TOUR of Downtown Gresham

July 12, 10am & 1pm

RESEARCH FILES

OUTLOOKing

Volunteer Mike Andrews spends hours each week sifting through bound volumes of the Gresham Outlook, which we recently received from the Outlook's closed print shop. While looking for damaged or missing pages, he also finds forgotten and unusual stories from Gresham's past. He'll be sharing a few of them in this recurring section.

Little-known Grant Butte in west Gresham generally keeps a low profile. There are homes around the base of the butte on three sides, an enclosed water reservoir near the top, and a few low-use trails throughout. But it's had its moments.

In the early 1930's, Grant Butte was the site of an annual motorcycle hill climbing event that drew competitors from around the Western U.S. as part of a professional circuit. The climb took place on the steep north side of the butte. The May 24, 1932 *Outlook* stated that "The hill is over 400 feet long and approximately a 75 percent pitch". In the 1931 race, only two competitors even made it to the top, with the other riders flipping their cycles backwards. The 1932 race went to 'Windy' Lindstrom of Fresno, California.

In August 1960, a wildfire broke out on the butte and burned 75 to 100 acres of timber and brush. Steep slopes, Gresham's infamous east wind, and lack of road access limited control efforts. Over 100 firefighters from Gresham, Portland, Corbett, Parkrose, and Clackamas County fought the blaze for three days before it was under control. No structures were lost, but the fire burned to within a few feet of some homes. Four firefighters sustained injuries. The August 11 *Outlook* said "Only four-wheel-drive vehicles and tractors could reach the burn area and heavy gear had to be packed up steep slopes".



Grant Butte from Arnold Ruegg's farm on Pleasant View Drive, 1920s. GHS #1766

FLOWER POWER: A WEEKEND FOR MOMS

That's a wrap on our first big fundraiser of the year, the Mother's Day weekend plant sale and flower crown workshops! Thanks to everyone who showed up and made this event a success.



HISTORY FEATURE

DANCING AND MORAL PANIC IN GRESHAM

By Hannah Jensvold

While glancing through the newspapers of Gresham and the surrounding areas from the early half of the 20th century, you will quickly notice the announcements for local dances dotted among the articles and advertisements, showing that dancing was one of the great entertainments of the day. A second glance at the articles alongside them, however, reveals it to be a controversial entertainment that many in this area thought a source of grave social evil. A typical announcement published in the *Gresham Outlook* in March 1911 for a "big dance" at Metzger Hall promises "Best music. Good time assured." Another, for a 1919 Thanksgiving dance at the Masonic Lodge in Gresham, boasts a 10-lb turkey give-away, "the Jazziest-Jazz", a midnight supper, and all-night dancing.

While dancing was an important social outlet for many, for others it was a source of fear about social ills and corruption, an entry-point for ne'er do-wells. The front page of the *Outlook* celebrated the successful opening of the iconic Regner's Opera House (now Amiton Furniture) on Christmas Day 1914. The article describes the large crowd in attendance, but rumblings of this fear can be seen in the latter-half of the article, which assures readers: "The gathering was composed of Gresham's best and

most orderly people. More than a third of the town was there with a good sprinkling from the country around. Although a public dance those outside of the pale of the elite circles were conspicuous by their absence."

Discourse around public dances featured concerns about these events attracting the wrong crowd. A May 1912 Rockwood Grange dance advertised in the *Outlook* addresses this by specifying that "[K]nown patrons of the Grange dances will be admitted if unobjectionable. All others will be refused admission unless introduced and vouched for by some responsible person." The May 1912 issue of the *Outlook* announces the Grange's switch to invitation-only dances in an effort to "weed out an objectionable class and preserve the moral tone of these entertainments." Many other dance announcements include a note that "undesirables will not be allowed." Various articles cite the trouble caused by noise, carousing youths, and "roughnecks" coming into town on the trolley from Portland. In 1912, Gresham town council made moves to tamp down this disorder with an ordinance that banned all dancing on Sunday, meaning dances would end at midnight on Saturday. Of course, even with these restrictions, dances continued into the night.

"Methodists didn't dance in those days."

To avoid restrictions on public dances, individuals with big living rooms would throw dances in their homes. In a 1985 oral history interview, Helen Barnes recalled that a woman she knew would take her wagon to Sandy after a day on the farm and dance all night, just to return home to her chores in the morning. Helen's father was a minister, so while she had been to the occasional square dance at the Grange, she gave a laugh as she confirmed that she would not have been allowed at the living room dances. After all, "Methodists didn't dance in those days." Siblings Don Page and Jean Popp similarly recalled that while there were dance halls, "good people didn't go to the those."

The idea of dancing itself as a bringer of moral downfall was also present. In February 1925, the Gresham Union High School (GUHS) board met to discuss whether school dances should be allowed. According to the *Outlook* article covering the meeting, the decision was a quick and unanimous "no." A Methodist pastor and a Baptist reverend both spoke on the matter, stating that dancing "contributed to demoralization of character, especially during adolescence" and that GUHS's reputation was "the cleanest in the country," something that dances could only degrade.

The 20s also gave rise to a new concern around dance events and the venues where they were held: alcohol. Prohibition brought new restrictions not just on liquor itself but also on local venues where it might be available. In August 1923, the Cedarville Park dance hall at Linnemann Junction lost its business license after an incident in which sheriff's deputies found liquor hidden in bushes outside the hall. Young men and women took frequent trips out of the hall to these bushes throughout the night. The *Outlook* article notes, "[I]t is contrary to the rules of rural dance halls for the young women to leave them for a stroll."

Continued on next page ➤

Firemens - First Aid Squad

DANCE

Proceeds for Benefit Fund of Gresham Volunteer Fire
Department and First Aid Squad

Chamber-Legion Hall, Gresham

FRI., OCTOBER 30

MUSIC BY

Dahlquist's Orchestra

Springer's Music

Admission **\$1.00** per Couple

PURCHASE TICKET FROM ANY FIREMAN

EVERYBODY WELCOME

Poster for a 1936 dance to benefit the Gresham
Fire Department. #2023.026.0001

HISTORY FEATURE

(continued from previous page)

The year before, in March 1922, a vice raid found drinking and dancing in mixed racial company in North Portland, a story that received weeks of coverage in the *Morning Oregonian*. In February 1920, the *Oregon Daily Journal* printed the headline "Jazz Halls Are Blamed For Many Falls of Youth - County Grand Jury Traces Crime to Too Lax Supervision of Various Places of Amusement."

Concerns about the connections between new jazz music, alcohol, dancing, and the moral deterioration of Oregon youth reached a fever pitch in the middle of the decade. In 1925, Multnomah County, urged by the Anti-Saloon League of Oregon, implemented a new dance hall law that placed dance halls and roadhouses under strict regulation, ensuring that licenses for such establishments only be obtained by individuals "of good moral character" as determined by the Sheriff. The following year, the Troutdale city council moved, in their fight against immorality, to ban all public dances in the city hall "owing to the regrettable fact that it seems impossible to conduct a respectable dance on account of the behavior of some who attend, and that it is a bad thing for the community in general."

Despite ever increasing scrutiny, Gresham youth still danced. In an interview from 1987, Gertrude van Horn reminisced on her teenage years in Gresham during the early 30s. While they weren't allowed to dance at school, she fondly remembered dancing with her friends after work. After she finished work at the theater around 9:30, her brother would drive them out to Blue Lake where they would dance in the open-air hall to live music. Gertrude graduated with one of the last classes of Gresham Union High students to not have school dances. Signaling a gradual shift in opinions around dancing in general, perhaps influenced by the influx of Dust Bowl migrants in the 30s, GUHS held its first school dance in 1939.

The students, having finally won, also held a Junior Dance and Senior Dance to finish out the school year. As Gresham entered the 40s, yearbook calendars reflect the student body's eagerness to dance with post-game dances, homecomings, and proms celebrating the occasions and milestones of high school. It was the mark of a generation developing a new view on the social value of gathering to dance.



Members of the Gresham Band at an Odd Fellows convention in Portland, 1925. #2024.001.0354

Regner's Opera House c.1915-1920. Photo by G.M. Davidson. #1787



Enjoy this excerpt from "Capsule History: Dry Goods in a Dance Hall," written by Pat Stone for the December 2000 newsletter.

The entire second floor of the [Amiton Furniture] building is, or was, a dance hall. With about 2000 square feet and benches for sitting all around the perimeter, the space was perfect for dances held every Saturday night. Charles Savereude, Gresham High School principal, forbade dances at the school and was most displeased with activities in this building.

Dances were sponsored by local organizations such as the Masonic Order and the Gresham Berry Growers. Gresham firemen held their annual dance there and the site also had boxing and wrestling matches and Christmas parties. The Latter Day Saints held services there each Sunday. It is reported they had to clean up after every boisterous event before they could hold their services. In short, the building was Gresham's community center from the 1920's-1950's.

Local musicians who provided the tunes included Roger Kidder, clarinet; Vern Bjur, trumpet, Harold Weber, cornet. Remembrances of the dances usually included descriptions of "How they hooped and hollered! They were loud and lively. All the second floor windows were opened up and you could hear that music all over town!"

The dance hall was reached by an 8 foot wide, outside ramp built up the east side. That open-sided, wood-roofed ramp was steep, steep, steep. On a Saturday afternoon with nothing better to do, boys pushed their bicycles up the top. The ride down the sharply-inclined ramp went so fast they were unable to brake, but went pell-mell, in a heart-thumping swoosh to the bottom. There, they took their chances bouncing off the ramp onto the sidewalk, off the curb into the street, and perhaps tangling with an unaware motorist passing by.....remind you of today's skateboarders?

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED

We love our volunteers! Our staff of about 50 volunteers helps out with everything from photographs to textiles and oral histories. They greet visitors to the museum, lead historical tours and lectures, and provide the heavy lift with property maintenance and repair.

An 11-member board of directors oversees the financial side of GHS and the museum, conducting fundraisers to support upkeep on GHS buildings and day-to-day expenses. The board also works closely with Executive Director Silvie Andrews to aid with grant funding, collections acquisitions, and marketing.

The generous donation of our volunteers' time ensures Gresham's history will continue to unfold and be available to future generations.

So let's get acquainted!

ROSE CAUGHIE, TEXTILE COLLECTIONS MANAGER

On days when Rose sets up a table in the gallery at the museum, those nearby take note because a box of historical textiles is sure to follow. As she unpacks delicate handmade shawls, cultural garments, or tattered military uniforms, volunteers gather to inspect Rose's latest treasures.

"We are the guardians of community history, preserving and sharing to the best of our ability the real lived experiences of past Gresham residents," she said. "The breadth of the collection and the support and training I received makes (the museum) a wonderful place to learn museum/archiving/library skills that can translate into a career in public education."

Rose arrived at the museum in 2022, originally for a "informational interview" with Executive Director Silvie Andrews. She was so taken with the collections and learning opportunities that she "filled out a volunteer form immediately."

"There are so many volunteer opportunities here," Rose said. "You can do pretty much what you want. The environment is extremely welcoming and supportive, especially thanks to Silvie and the community of volunteers. Managing and care for the textile and garment collection is only part of the public education we provide."



BESS WILLS, GHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

One of the community's most recognizable and respected business owners, Bess Wills, joined the GHS board this January. A California transplant, Bess has been the co-owner of Gresham Ford for more than two decades and is known for her advocacy among groups and agencies across Gresham and East Multnomah County. Her actions and dedication to her adopted hometown are another way of preserving who we are and where we came from.

"A community is about its past, present and future," Bess explained. "GHS plays an important role in providing meaningful recognition of the past, especially local history. (The historical society) provides that lens into our 'local past' that we cannot get anywhere else."

The historic Carnegie building, according to Bess, is one of several iconic structures in downtown Gresham that speak to the community's pride in its roots. But is the

downtown core also one the community's best kept secrets?

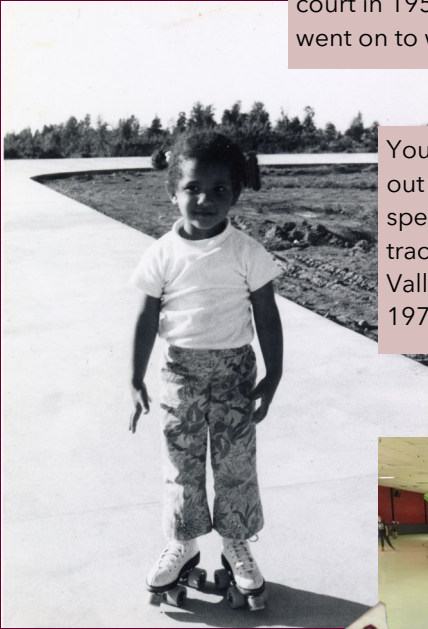
"We have the potential to have a vibrant Main Street but it needs people to come enjoy and celebrate it," Bess said. "Since I do not own a business in downtown, I felt helping GHS would be something that I could do that would help with that vision."

PHOTO ESSAY

ROLLER SKATING IN GRESHAM

From speed skating to beauty pageants, Gresham skaters have competed all over the continent—but never lost sight of the joys of skating.

Georgene Lumsden, Roller Skating Queen of Oregon, with her court in 1951. Georgene, a Gresham High School student, went on to win the national championship that year.



Young skater tries out the new speed skating track at Powell Valley Elementary, 1970.



Fred and Edith Flescher, owners of the Centre Skating Rink, with their children, c.1960.



Skate World, Gresham's last skating rink, shortly before it closed in 2018.



Millard Sharp and Joe Anderson in front of the Fun Centre at 50 NE Elliot. The Fun Centre (sometimes just called the Centre), marketed as the only "unified recreation center" in the Northwest, opened in May 1946. It was the start of the Baby Boom, when young couples with children were emerging as the dominant suburban demographic. The Centre included a skating rink, bowling alley, restaurant, and café, offering (clean) entertainment for all ages.

GHS 1946



MEMBERSHIP

Membership at the Gresham Historical Society supports the continued preservation and sharing of our local history. Now, more than ever, we rely on member support to continue our mission.

Not a member already? You can join on our website, at greshamhistorical.org.

Or, fill out the form below and bring it to the museum, or mail it to us at PO Box 65, Gresham, OR 97030. Please make checks payable to *Gresham Historical Society*.

MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT/RENEWAL FORM

Member or Family Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

CHOOSE YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Each membership level includes 10% off museum store purchases, a subscription to the quarterly newsletter, and invitations to members-only events throughout the year.

- ☐ **Individual** \$25 membership for one adult
- ☐ **Dual** \$35 membership for two adults
- ☐ **Family** \$50 benefits for two adults and all family members under 18
- ☐ **Business** \$150 two membership cards for any employee
- ☐ **Business Plus** \$500 two membership cards for any employee and your business logo in the Quarterly of the Gresham Historical Society
- ☐ **Patron** \$1,000

I wish to make an additional donation in the amount of \$ _____

How do you prefer to receive your newsletter? ☐ Email ☐ Print

PAYMENT INFORMATION

Payment method (circle one): Cash Check (payable to Gresham Historical Society)

Please charge my credit/debit card \$ _____

Card number _____ Expiration date _____ CVV _____

Signature _____



Congregation of the Hillsview Covenant Church in 1931, reflecting a community of Swedish and Japanese farmers. #2022.001.0086

MEMBERSHIP

**THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE JOINED,
RENEWED, OR DONATED SINCE MARCH:**

Linda Anderson
Ann Anderson
Cristine Annice
Wendell & Ruthe Ayers
Melissa & Logan Beveney
Rose Billington
Jim Blew
Jen Bodendorfer
Marilou Bohmann
Debby Brown
Jeremy Buck
Eric & Jenny Byrne
Kathleen Cannon
The Center for Men's & Women's Urology
Clackamas County Bank
Karen Consbruck
Janice Corder
Courtyard Fountains Senior Living
Robert & Annie Curttright
Christina Daily
Dorothy Douglas
Karylenn D. and M. Patton Echols
Anne & John Endicott
Margaret Erikson
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Julie Ann Farnham
Roberta & Robert Forbes
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Thomas Fujii
Stephanie Gallian
Greg Garcia, Jr. & Raven Graham
Donna Germundson
Mike Giannetti
Fred & Teresa Gilbert
Gilroy Family
Janine & Paul Gladfelter
Mike & Lorna Glenn
Gordon Family
Paul Grad
Gresham Ford
Gresham Memorial Chapel
Gresham Senior Center
Sunny & Judy Han
Richard Hansen
Trenton Scott Harden
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Marilyn Hays
Jana Ince-Carey
Karen Jarrett
Mickey & Clint Jenson
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Carl A. & Hideko Toni Kato
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Corrie Bree Wardlow
Teresa Wenzel
Kathleen Williamson & Madison Hanson
Bess Wills & Bob Avila
Sandra Wilson
Shirley Wright

In-Kind Donations

Foraged Blooms—flower crown materials
Minuteman Press Gresham—printing
April Avery—office supplies

**SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR
BUSINESS PLUS MEMBERS:**





Gresham volunteer firefighters battle a training fire with backpack sprayers, 1940s. GHS 1996.008.0001

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR NEWSLETTER SPONSOR:



The Gresham Historical Society is a private, nonprofit organization that manages the Gresham Historical Museum and special collections library and archive, located in the 1913 former Gresham Library building in Historic Downtown Gresham.

Founded in 1976 and funded through donations from the community, the Gresham Historical Society was run exclusively by volunteers for the majority of its history.

In 2010, Multnomah County voters passed a property tax levy to support local history. These levy funds pay the salary of a full-time museum director, which helps keep us free and open to the public.

Our mission is to preserve and share our community's past to enrich its present and future.

HOURS

Wednesday-Saturday	10am-4pm
Sunday	12pm-4pm
Monday-Tuesday	Closed

CONTACT

Web: greshamhistorical.org/contact

Email: info@greshamhistorical.org

Phone: (503) 661-0347

Board and Staff

President Sue Piazza ✦ **Vice President** Lon Shiiki ✦ **Treasurer** Leslie Radke ✦ **Secretary** Cassie Rafalski

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Museum Director Silvie Andrews ✦ **Public Historians** Stephanie Vallance and Melissa Beveney

Textile Collections Manager Rose Caughie