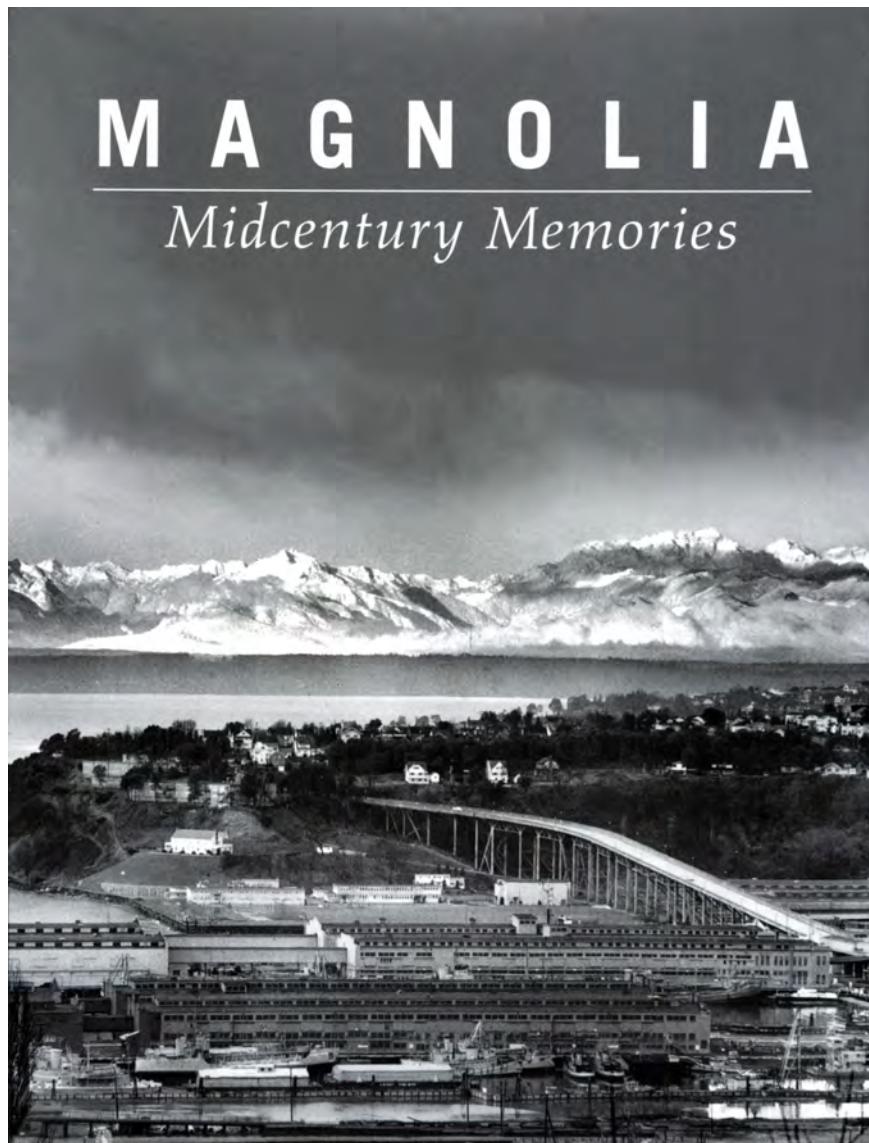




MHS News

Fall 2019

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING ABOUT MAGNOLIA'S UPCOMING HISTORY BOOK III



"...I can highly recommend! "

— Paul Dorpat
Seattle Historian

"...a perfect window...told lovingly...what isn't in prose is in wonderful black-and-white photographs depicting the places, faces and spirit of Magnolia at midcentury."

— Larry Phillips
Past King County Council
District 4

"...stories of Magnolia...
more importantly, of America."

— Kip M. Robertson
Regional Librarian
Magnolia Branch

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This project is under the fiscal sponsorship of the Magnolia Historical Society
and provided by a Seattle Department of Neighborhoods Matching Grant



Interview with Mike Musselwhite, Book III Writer

As a life-long Magnolian, what do you love about this place?

I truly enjoy the friendships that I have made and continue to make over the years here in Magnolia. I still have friends living in Magnolia with whom I went to Lawton Elementary School. Magnolia is very much like living in a small town. As one walks through the Village one either knows the people they pass or recognizes the passing people as Magnolia residents. If you take a few minutes to look either way down McGraw Street, as it straight lines through the Village, you will notice many warm greetings and conversations taking place along the sidewalks.

Talk a little about getting involved with the Magnolia book — how and what it means to you; and about your subject matter.

I was attending a weekly Friday morning coffee group (five or six guys who have known each other for over 50 years) at Whole Foods, when Gene Willard mentioned he was writing about his family's long ownership of Ships Restaurant at the foot of the Magnolia Bridge. Gene explained he was part of a group of people brought together by Monica Wooton to begin writing the third book about Magnolia's history in the '50s and '60s. As it turned out, Gene mentioned to Monica that I had worked at the Magnolia Theater in that time period. It was not long before I received a call from Monica inquiring if I would be interested in joining the writers' group. I jumped at the chance and have enjoyed every moment of my participation. As a teacher and school administrator, I have written many, many memos and other forms of communication but none of those have afforded me the pure joy of writing for the third book of Magnolia's history.

The Magnolia Theater is one of the most lamented losses on the Bluff. Why do you think that is?

In a very real sense, there were no positives associated with the loss of the Magnolia Theater. The Theater dominated the Village by virtue of its size and what went on there. In an era of few shopping malls, no texts or tweets, or other means of staying connected with friends, a young person or anyone else could meet up with a friend or friends and enjoy some time together at the theater. It was a place where one could simply disconnect from their reality and be transported to a world pictured on a giant movie screen where laughter, groans, applause or any other human emotion could be experienced. When the movies (in those days, two movies plus a cartoon were the norm) were over, you could reconnect to your own world and go about your business. Above all, it was a meeting place where positive interactions could happen and for the most part would happen.

In the years since the loss of the theater, nothing has come along to replace the magic the Magnolia Theater provided for the community.

Are you excited about the new Magnolia book and why?

I am very excited about the release of the third historical book on Magnolia. I cannot wait to read what others have written about their memories and personal experiences. This new book, along with the other two already written, will outlive all who have participated. They will be available to those yet unborn to have the opportunity to explore and enjoy the experiences of those who had the great fortune to live in this vibrant community before them.

Michael grew up in Magnolia and attended Lawton Elementary and Blaine Junior High, and graduated from Queen Anne High School. He retired after nearly forty years with the Seattle Public Schools as a teacher and principal.

During the late 1950s and early '60s, he worked at the Magnolia, Uptown, Colonial, and Roosevelt Theaters in a variety of jobs including assistant manager and manager for the Sterling Theater chain of theaters.

Michael continues to make his home in the Magnolia community and remains a very active movie-goer!



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M A G N O L I A

Midcentury Memories

"... I can highly recommend!" — Paul Dorpat, Seattle Historian



Magnolia Village, 1968
32nd Avenue West. Photo
by Ken Baxter.

BOOK III COMING SPRING 2020

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WHAT THEY ARE SAYING ABOUT MAGNOLIA'S UPCOMING HISTORY BOOK III

Magnolia: Midcentury Memories had me repeating as I read – first with a whisper – the book pusher's bromide, “I can highly recommend.” And 'tis true. With strong voice, I recommend you read these memories – the third volume by Magnolia's residents. (First was the award-winning volume in 2001, *Magnolia: Memories & Milestones*. Then, the award-nominated *Magnolia: Making More Memories* in 2007). This book is distinguished by the intimacy of the subjects covered and the histories well told. Other neighborhoods might follow Magnolia and let Seattle read living histories by essayist citizens...but back to this – and I repeat: I can highly recommend!

— Paul Dorpat, Seattle Historian

Here is a perfect window to see a dynamic Seattle community embracing traditions, challenged by the times and emerging aspirations. Authentic tales of growing up in an “idyllic” 1950s, the stories set the stage for an era of transition for Americans, and for Magnolians. Parents represent the values of the “Greatest Generation.” Children explore boundaries of authority as the “Me Generation.” Perspectives and expectations play out in churches, schools, parks, living rooms, and backyards of the authors. Told lovingly by those who were compatriots on the bluff...friends biking, swimming or movie-going at the long-gone Magnolia Theater, to the challenges endured as Army BRATs at Fort Lawton or as young soldiers shipped off to Vietnam. What isn't in prose is in wonderful black-and-white photographs depicting the places, faces, and spirit of Magnolia at midcentury.

— Larry Phillips, Past King County Councilmember, District 4

Magnolia: Midcentury Memories perfectly captures through delightful first-person narratives, history and anecdotes the transformation of a sleepy, somewhat rural community into a post-World War II baby-boom neighborhood of Seattle. The residents of Magnolia, like all Americans, genuinely lived the “American Experience” – the rise of shopping malls, the upheavals of the civil rights movement, the popularity of rock and roll music, and so much more. The stories shared are the stories of Magnolia, of Seattle; but, more importantly, they are the stories of America.

— Kip M. Roberson, Regional Manager, Magnolia Branch Library

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Hot Rods, Hamburgers, and History: MHS Annual Meeting Draws Lively Crowd

Rockers, greasers, flower children, and even a couple of “squares” were on hand May 21 for the Society’s annual meeting, harkening back to the 1950s and ‘60s theme of the upcoming *Magnolia: Midcentury Memories* book.

Outside Magnolia United Church of Christ, ‘50s and ‘60s vintage hot rods lined the street, while inside, members and guests—many decked out in period costume—enjoyed burgers from Dick’s Drive-In and readings by some of the book’s authors.

Whitney Mason read from her extensively researched chapter on the neighborhood battle that ended with homes being trucked away to make way for the construction of Catherine Blaine Junior High School and the adjoining community center. The idea of a parks department and school district teaming up to develop adjacent facilities was relatively untested at the time, and created a bitter division within the community, Mason said. “Some embraced it and others had to be convinced.”



Hot rods lined up in front of event held at Magnolia United Church of Christ.

Artist Brom Wikstrom authored one of the chapters on growing up in hilly Magnolia, and remembered scavenging scraps of lumber and suitable wheels to build the “bugs” that rattled down the steep hills—West Barrett Street being a particular favorite that provided many a thrill, not to mention a few skinned knees and chipped teeth.

Monica Wooton, project manager for the book, covered some highlights of her chapter on the clandestine street-racing scene in Magnolia. Nowadays, it’s hard to picture, but hot-rodgers would block off a quarter-mile chunk of Magnolia Boulevard or 34th Avenue West, position a lookout to watch for the cops, and burn rubber to earn bragging rights at school or tune their machines up for competition at the local drag strip. Some say if you know where to look, you can still see the paint stripes that marked off the makeshift course....

The evening also included the election of MHS Board members for the coming year, and plenty of opportunities for everyone to listen to some golden oldies, savor their burgers, check out the customized machines out front, and mingle with friends old and new.

Thank you to MAX (Magnolia Art Experience) for co-sponsoring our meeting.

“History is who we are and why we are the way we are!”
— David McCullough

Mike Musselwhite, who worked as assistant manager of the long-gone and lamented Magnolia Theater, recalled how the movie house served as the community center in those pre-digital days. He drew laughs with his memory of the theater manager flipping a switch in the office, turning on fans that sent the aroma of freshly made popcorn wafting into the auditorium twenty minutes before intermission.

Of course, cars ruled in the ‘50s and ‘60s, and naturally figure prominently in the upcoming volume—from homemade, gravity-powered “go-karts” to serious racing machines that tore up the Boulevard in late-night matchups.

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Monica Wooton

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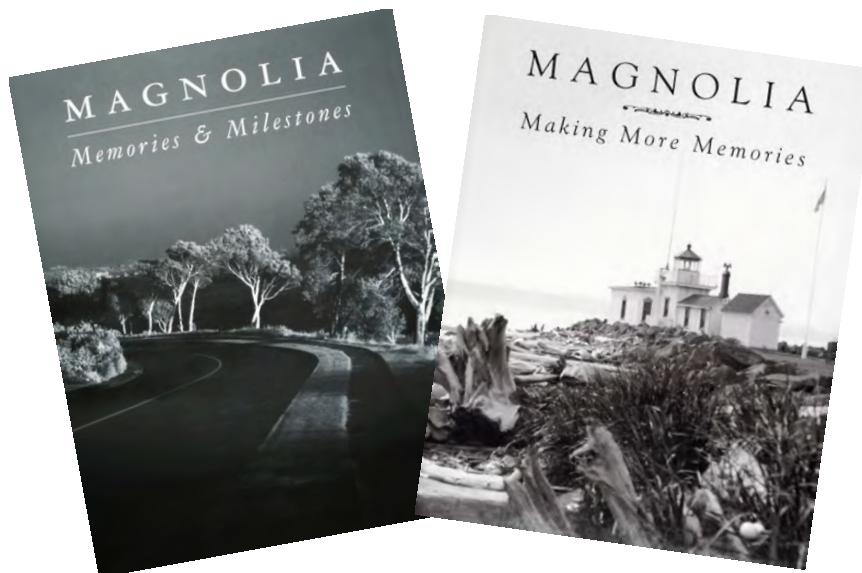
Interested in becoming a Board Member or Volunteer?

Contact: Dee St. George
(206) 284-5480



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Magnolia's Bookstore
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Magnolia Historical Society Mission

Initiate interest in Magnolia history - gather and protect it for future generations.

Inspire the Magnolia community to help us gather acquisitions for our photo and document archives at UW Special Collections.

Invest in community historical research and writing of Magnolia history that encourages historic projects and events.

Encourage a more accurate "sense of place" through our work preserving the stories and images of Magnolia.