They Don’t Make ‘Em Like They Used To: Renton’s Historic Buildings
By Eric Haddenham, Museum Intern

Editor’s Note: Eric Haddenham, the author of this article, has been an intern at the Museum off and on for the past three years. A Renton resident, when Eric started with us he was a Math major at Willamette University; he is now about to begin graduate studies in Architecture at Washington University in St. Louis. This summer, Eric was compiling data sheets on Renton’s historic buildings and sites for the Museum, as well as creating a PowerPoint survey comparing historic and present-day photos of these sites. It is that experience that he brings to this passionate overview of his hometown’s historic architecture.

Buildings define the very character of a city. The details of those buildings can communicate power, beauty, and style, and the craftsmanship of older buildings is far less mechanical than newer buildings. Yet newer buildings can bring in new ideas and stir the imagination, while communicating power, grace, and beauty. Older buildings’ uniqueness conjures up the phrase, “They don’t make ‘em like they used to.” Most architects try to maintain and restore that nostalgic feel in some of their newer buildings and restorations because of their character, creating a style called “New Urbanism.” It is important to understand the past and to keep it, while moving forward.

Renton still has many buildings that have character, and is creating new ones. From brick Colonial Revival to Art Deco, they all are pleasant to look at and much more interesting than some of the newer buildings that have been created. Simply drive or walk around downtown and there are restored brick buildings to find as well as great architectural additions like the Transit Center. One of the best examples of a historic downtown building is the Thorne Building on Wells, just south of Second on the west side. It was originally the second Williams and McKnight General Store constructed from 1908 to 1914. It also housed the Seattle Sporting Goods Company for a time. The old Williams and McKnight painted masonry sign is faded on the south side of the building, but the extensive renovation of the building has made it stand out downtown.

Masthead photo: The Renton History Museum (formerly Fire Sta. No.1) is one of Renton’s preservation success stories.
President's Message

By Laura Clawson, President

In his last message Bob Hunt described himself as “an artifact moving on.” I guess that makes me a newly-accessioned artifact. In following the time-honored RHS Board tradition of electing the “candidate who least objects to serving,” I am now your President. Although it is in many ways a daunting job, I agree with Bob that it should also be enjoyable. In fact, I’m sure it will.

This is my 6th year on the Board. Initially I chaired the Accreditation Committee, a new committee given the task of exploring ways and means towards accreditation by the American Association of Museums. We drafted the mission and vision statements under which we operate today, using AAM standards and requirements. In retrospect this was an excellent project for a new trustee. We delved into the Articles of Incorporation and learned about RHS from its very foundation. We could then re-state the founders’ vision for the future. If RHS adheres to this vision we will stay on track.

Just as Bob Hunt was leaving, the Board purchased what we have named the Museum Annex Building, formerly Scotty’s Detailing on Park Avenue. Bob will oversee remodeling it to suit our specific needs. Space has long been a critical issue for the Museum and this solution will carry us forward for a number of years. We also view this purchase as a wise investment, increasing in value as our City continues to be redeveloped. Its location is perfect for quick access from the Museum. It will have a variety of uses including work space and storage. Remodeling and moving into the facility will take many volunteers. Anyone interested in helping can call the museum.

Lastly I want to mention the historic reconstruction of the Museum’s coal car, a project we undertook with the Northwest Railway Museum in late January. An open house hosted by the NRM at their Conservation Research Center in Snoqualmie celebrated its completion in style. The research, restoration process, the attention to historical detail and state-of-the-art facility were so impressive! Snoqualmie Mayor Matt Larson, who formerly lived in Renton, spoke of the ties between the two cities. 4Culture staff member Pat Filer remarked that the collaboration between two museums on an artifact is unusual and has been noticed by the heritage community. It was an outstanding event.

I am looking forward to the challenges ahead—our Museum Master Plan, Annex renovation, and new exhibits for 2009—and I invite you to be a part of these plans with us!
Renton Historical Quarterly

Renton Museum Report

By Elizabeth P. Stewart

As I write this, the Olympics in Beijing are well underway. In the run-up to the start of the Games, I was interested to see journalists describe the explosive physical growth there, the demolition and new construction that accompanied Beijing’s quest to become a modern city. “New Beijing, New Olympics” was the Chinese slogan for their bid to host the 2008 Olympics, and the government took that literally, sweeping away the old to make way for 31 Games venues, an expanded subway system, and the numerous chain restaurants and hotels needed by games-goers.

A particular target of developers were the hutong, the narrow centuries-old alleyways threading through the Old City, surrounded by tiny courtyard homes made of brick and wood. Author Michael Meyer reports in his book The Last Days of Old Beijing (2008) that a 1949 survey recorded over 7000 of these unique lanes; by 2005 only 1300 remained. Meyer lived for two years as the only Westerner on Red Bayberry and Bamboo Slanted Street in the Dazhalan hutong. A preservationist at heart, Meyer describes the loss of the hutong residents’ “unique pattern of life,” an agonizing process in which these tiny, almost fully self-sufficient neighborhoods were torn apart, their homes completely erased and residents forcibly relocated miles away in tall, sterile apartment blocks.

This modernization is difficult even to read about. One displaced hutong resident told Meyer that he had a friend record the GPS coordinates of his little home before it was replaced by a Ritz Carlton Hotel. “Now I can take my kid back one day and stand in the hotel lobby and say, ‘I grew up here,’” he told Meyer.

Why is this important to Renton residents? Beijing is a sped-up example of the desire for the new, the shiny, and the modern that has motivated so much change in cities here in our own backyard. Eric Haddenham’s impassioned feature in this quarterly points to the mistakes we’ve made in the past—the beautiful nineteenth-century homes replaced by empty lots—and the achievements we can be proud of—our own Museum in the original Fire Station. In our drive for improvement, it’s easy to forget that there can be a human cost when we lose the landmarks that make our city unique. Representative government allows us as U.S. citizens to avoid the kind of wholesale destruction now taking place in China’s capital. But it would be helpful to bear in mind the sad history of the disappearing Beijing hutong.

That does not mean there haven’t been mistakes in renovation, such as the old City Hall building just south of the Thorne building. The very first City Hall (built in 1903) was demolished in 1923 and replaced by this second City Hall. It was a brick Colonial Revival-style building very similar to the Thorne Building. It housed the fire department and police department as well. The original brick building can only be seen from the back and the side now, because in 1959 the front was covered by a green Art Deco façade that detracts from the original structure. When you compare this current building to the Thorne Building, the Thorne Building is outstanding.

Some, like Renton High School, successfully maintain the old while adding the new by acknowledging the past. Few now remember the original high school that was built in 1912 where the IKEA Performing Arts Center now stands. It was a two-story brick structure of Colonial Revival design that included a clock tower and a belfry. This original building became the junior high school after the present-day building was built in 1931. This building was torn down in 1942 and replaced by the new junior high school, which would later become the east wing of Renton High and still later was torn down and replaced by the IKEA Performing Arts Center. Several additions, such as the gym and science wing, were built along the way. The renovations in 2002 and 2003 brought the building back to its old glory days, as well as adding new modern amenities.
One of the better renovations in Renton, and one of the more hidden, is the Old Milwaukee Substation, located behind Mclendon Hardware and next to the recently disappeared Four Cow-Wide Tunnel. The brick substation was built before 1918; it has been renovated and preserved while adding exterior steel beams and a glass stairwell to the building’s original form. There is a modern, metal addition in the back that perhaps doesn’t match the original brick and the new beams, but the overall building is in great shape and is an awesome office building.

A similar building is the Snoqualmie Falls Power Substation, the oldest brick building in Renton (1898), located across the street from the Museum at Third and Mill. It has been on the Washington Heritage Register and a King County Landmark since 1982. Except for the interior, roof, and fire escape, it is essentially the same structure that housed the turn-of-the-century power plant for converting electricity from the Snoqualmie Falls Dam. Both of these buildings are fine examples of former industrial buildings being transformed into buildings for businesses.
Driving around the older parts of the Highlands, Kennydale, and Renton Hill, you can see numerous well-restored houses that are much more appealing to look at and live in because of their character. The Alexander Fournier House on Pelly Avenue hasn’t been altered from its original 1918 form, and has been meticulously kept up and renovated. The Henry Martin House (1910) and the homes in the Sartorisville Addition on North Second Avenue have both been well taken care of and are in their original states. Finally, the George W. Custer House on Wells has just undergone a restoration project to look like the 1915 renovation (the house was originally built in 1902).

Many of the newer suburban additions are forgettable compared to historic neighborhoods. Many have more garage than yard and are squeezed together. These developments are less accessible to public transportation, create longer drives and traffic jams, and often remove the large, lush green trees this state is known for. That is not to say newer buildings do not have value to Renton. Newer homes help house all the new residents coming to our city. In fact some of the newer developments are located in former industrial areas, such as the developments at the Barbee Mill and Port Quendall sites and the Seahawks practice facility.

But these large suburban developments could be improved by greener construction codes and more unique styling. The new Seahawks practice facility is an impressive and stylish addition to Kennydale and re-energizes a once industrial part of Renton, just as the Transit Center helped re-energize a blighted spot in downtown Renton. The Landing will also be an impressive addition to Renton and an excellent example of revitalizing this area with modern structures and commerce.

But there are also some examples of buildings that have been neglected or torn down for things that no citizen of Renton would say improve the city. The former Charles S. Custer House was an imposing Victorian home built in 1881 on Main Street. Instead of being moved and saved like the George W. Custer House, it was demolished by neglect and destroyed after an arson attack. Today the site of the Custer home is an undeveloped lot north of Pounders Tavern that has been vacant for 40 years. The best current example of demolition by neglect, however, is the Elliott Farm on Maple Valley Highway. Built between 1906 and 1911 by dairy farmer R. J. Elliott, the house and outbuildings have only survived this long because of his craftsmanship. It was declared a King County Landmark in the 1980s and has been caught in a constant tug-of-war between developers and preservationists since then. The protected area has shrunk and several of the buildings have fallen apart.
Many other older buildings have been lost, such as the Bagley Mansion onEarlington Hill; the Carnegie Library near the tennis courts in Liberty Park; the Henry Ford School on Main Street; and two of the four downtown Renton theatres (the Rainier and the Grand). We can only hope that this lack of urban planning and historic preservation is on its way out in Renton and the U.S. as a whole. There are some hopeful signs. The last remaining of the four theatres (though the youngest), the Renton Civic Theatre building is still in its 1940 Art Deco form. The Sweet Center was built in the early 1920s and is still in Liberty Park. The Renton History Museum is housed in the old Fire Station #1 and also maintains its own Art Deco form from 1942. So there is hope for old buildings, but if, for example, the Museum needs to expand or get a new building, I wonder whether the fire station would be preserved or become part of the list of demolished old buildings.

The city of Renton has many wonderful buildings that we as citizens may take for granted. Some of these have been lost, but some still stand as examples that we can fulfill Renton’s economic and housing needs while exercising responsible historic preservation and planning for new green buildings. Only time will tell if Renton will preserve its character and add great things to the city.
Dear museum members and volunteers,

Part I
First of all I want to thank all of you who helped with Renton River Days this year. It takes a big team effort to make it work. This year the museum’s goal was to teach children, through hands-on activities, about the lives of Coast Salish Native Americans before the arrival of the white people. Roger Fernandes, Coast Salish artist, storyteller, and our consultant, made a template of a hat and vest similar to those that were worn by Native Americans in Puget Sound. Originally, those two items would be woven by women out of cedar bark.

In our case, volunteers cut hat and vest forms out of brown paper. Devina Balagopal, our new volunteer from India, spent endless hours making the forms. She was supported by Calvin Yee, Eric Haddenham, and two mother-daughter teams: Rachel Vdolek and her mother Alice Vdolek, and Patricia Carroll and her mother Phyl Carroll. Patricia and Phyl came to the museum to help on Phyl’s birthday it meant a lot to us. Thank you to Rachel and Patricia for suggesting that their mothers volunteer at the museum. We will count on all four of you in the future.
Bill Collins, Calvin Yee, Ruth Capriles’s husband and RHS president Laura Clawson, helped in putting up and taking down the museum booth at the Liberty Park. Thanks to all of them, this year’s Renton River Days set-up and take-down operation was much easier than in previous years.

The crucial part of the effort revolved around staffing the museum and the museum booth during RRD. Thanks to our volunteers Rachel and Alice Vdolek, Eric Haddenham, Janene Sestak, Devina Balagopal, Shirley Phinney, Jessica Fleming, Calvin Yee, and RHS board members, Laura Clawson, Sandra Myers, Theresa Clymer, Kristie Walker, and Robin Baches for spending hours helping children with activities at the museum booth. We had a total of 781 visitors at the booth on Kids Day and Renton River Days weekend. You can imagine the amount of work volunteers handled on those days!

I can’t miss mentioning the greeters who served 284 visitors at the museum during the RRD week. Thanks to Ila Hemm, Sandra Burkey, Don Emmons, Ernest Lees, Elaine Wells, and Ruth Capriles for welcoming so many people and making Renton history available to our community. Ernest Lees even worked both days of the RRD weekend.

In addition, Shirley Phinney, Nancy Fairman, and Helanne Botham sold coffee and donuts to festival vendors from 7:00 to 11:00 a.m. on four festival days. All their profits go to our budget.

Thanks to all parties involved we made our mission of educating the public about some aspects of the Renton history fulfilled. THANK YOU!!!

Part II

In response to concerns expressed by museum tour guides, staff and docents met in June to exchange ideas about changes in museum exhibits and tours. We agreed on several common goals: teaching how the economy drives history, based on Renton’s example; giving visitors, particularly children, an opportunity to experience historical objects; instilling pride in Renton; being relevant to Renton’s increasingly diverse population; and providing interesting educational activities and speakers. The goals expressed by docents and the museum staff are also captured in the Historical Society’s 5-10 Year Strategic Plan.

Our next meeting of staff and docents will be held in January or February 2009. Anyone interested in becoming a docent is also invited—we’re looking now for docents interested in taking our curricular materials into classrooms, and growing the next generation of local historians!
The closing of the 2008 Seafair festivities brought a valuable piece of history into the Museum: a scrapbook chronicling Renton’s many years of prize-winning float entries in the Torchlight Parade. The scrapbook was created by the designer of Renton’s successful floats, Roger Ford. Mr. Ford worked for Boeing as a commercial artist and designed parade floats on the side. His designs were ambitious creations that used themes from throughout history and around the world.

Seafair has been around since 1950 when it was created to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the founding of Seattle. Renton entered its first community float in the 1958 Seafair Parade circuit. The float, “Fantasy in Lace,” carried the Miss Renton Queen and her Princesses; it won first prize in the Torchlight Parade. Subsequent Renton floats were even more successful, with three floats winning the Governor’s Trophy.

The elaborate floats’ construction involved creating many interconnected platforms called “outriggers.” The brightly decorated platforms featured foil, flowers, feathers, fabric, and one year, even animated butterflies! Ornately costumed extras often accompanied the Queen and Princesses decked out in white ball gowns, sparkling tiaras, and gloves. Work on the floats began months in advance and continued right up until the float ran in the parade. The 1962 float had the two “chief foil crinklers” up until the early morning hours of parade day.

The creation of these outstanding floats was truly a community effort. Newspaper articles list the numerous service clubs, businesses, and individuals that donated supplies, time, and expertise. Year after year, Renton residents worked together to raise the thousands of dollars necessary to build and decorate these amazing floats. The story of the community floats recorded in this scrapbook is just another example of the “civic spirit” still alive in Renton today.
As part of our ongoing series on planned giving, in this installment we look at how the Renton Historical Society depends on its endowment to plan for our future vitality as a Renton institution.

DEFINITION OF AN ENDOWMENT

An endowment is an investment fund set aside for the long-term support of a non-profit or charitable organization. The principal is protected, and only the income on that investment, or a portion of the income, is spent. The donor may specify how that income may be used or the organization’s governing board may make the decisions. Either way, the aim is to safeguard the long-term future of the organization. The Renton Historical Society has an endowment policy that governs the Board’s decisions about the fund.

WHY CREATE AN ENDOWMENT FOR THE RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY?

The endowment provides financial stability for the Renton Historical Society and makes long-range planning possible, by providing a predictable stream of income. It also protects the organization in years when other revenue is reduced, during a recession, for example. Inevitably, there will be peaks and valleys in governmental support, corporate grants, and the annual fund drive. Endowment income can, to some extent, smooth these peaks and valleys.

Although the endowment has many advantages, it is not designed to address short-term needs. If the Society had to use every available dollar to meet day-to-day needs, this would diminish the fund’s purpose in securing and growing the fund for the long-term.

In other words, the endowment is different from reserve funds, which may be tapped to cover a budget deficit or to carry out a special project. Typically, no invasion of principal is anticipated or allowed. This year, however, an emergency situation required the Board to consider whether to temporarily tap the Building Fund of our endowment. The deteriorating condition of our offsite collection storage was brought to the Board’s attention by three collections experts during the CAP and CMAP surveys. Given the need to secure the long-term safety of the collection, the Board decided to use the Building fund. At the same time, the Board made arrangements to reimburse that fund over time.

Endowments are vital for those organizations that are likely to be a permanent part of their communities—universities, hospitals, arts organizations, museums, churches, and others. For these, endowment gifts can provide a stable, enduring, and growing source of support. The Renton Historical Society is a cornerstone of the community, as it is the primary repository for all of Renton’s history.

HOW ARE PLANNED GIVING AND AN ENDOWMENT RELATED?

Planned giving helps us build the endowment fund, since these gifts can be specifically designated for that particular fund. Most endowments have been built through planned gifts, so there is a strong relationship between the two. The Renton Historical Society has developed an endowment policy which governs how the monies will be invested and outlines the responsibilities of the Endowment Committee. This policy reassures anyone wishing to donate that their contribution will help build the Society into a bigger and better institution.

For more information on the Renton Historical Society’s Nonprofit Endowment Program or on making a planned gift, please contact Shane Klingenstein of Edward Jones at 1.888.891.8832.

Please note that the information contained herein is not intended to provide specific legal or financial advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for such professional advice. The Renton Historical Society encourages you to seek professional legal, estate planning, and financial advice before deciding on a course of action.
COAL CAR COMES BACK, NEWLY RECONSTRUCTED!

Since January, staff from the Northwest Railway Museum (NRM) and the Renton History Museum have been working together to get our coal mine car preserved for future generations. Now the project is complete, thanks to a grant from the 4Culture Heritage Special Projects grant program. On Thursday, September 18, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., we will officially welcome the mine car back to the Museum, this time out of the rain in the main gallery.

This reconstruction project has been eye-opening for all of us. Before we took the car up to the Northwest Railway Museum’s Conservation and Restoration Center, the wood and iron of the car had considerably deteriorated because of exposure to our area’s rain, wind, and sun. The aim of the project was to rebuild the crumbling wooden sections and return the car to its original structure, as it would have been used in the mines. NRM Collection Care Manager Bill Hall brought an engineer’s eye and fastidiousness to all the details that go into correct historic reconstruction, and NRM Director Richard Anderson likewise contributed his knowledge of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Treatment of Historic Structures. RHM Collection Manager Sarah Iles and Director Liz Stewart contributed research to the project, and posted bi-weekly progress reports on our website. (You can still see these at www.tinyurl.com/rentonhistorynews.)

The coal car that you will see as the centerpiece of our coal mining exhibit now represents exactly what Renton miners might have used as they gave the city its economic start by dragging out all that coal. The partnership between our two museums, combined with 4Culture’s assistance, ensured that this object will have plenty to teach us for years to come. Please join us on the evening of Sept. 18 to meet Bill and Richard, and celebrate the return of this important piece of history!

Below: The coal car in the Northwest Railway Museum’s Conservation and Restoration Center. The coal mine car represented a very small project compared to what they’re used to!

Above: Volunteer & Education Coordinator Dorota Rahn and Collection Manager Sarah Iles took a group of docents and volunteers to visit the car (nothing but wheels and axles) at the CRC in March.

Above: Richard Anderson and Bill Hall of the Northwest Railway Museum pose proudly with the nearly complete coal mine car.

Below: This “before” photo shows the definite lean that the coal car had, because of its crumbling wood and rusting iron.
**New Memberships**
Barbara & Steve Rabon
Mary Pociak
Ed & Meegan Prince family
Kris MacKay
Joe & Loretta Starkovich
Maxine Gamba
Glenn & Janet Bressan family
Kristie & Colin Walker family
Theresa Clymer family

**New Business Members**
Robert S. Green

**General Contributions**
Boeing Gift Matching Program – Glenn Anderson
John & Katherine Connell
Valerie Cook (Australian visitor)

**General Contributions over $100**
Jean Newell towards the restoration of
“Jean’s Beauty Shop” sign which she donated
Jack Morrison, in appreciation of support to honor Randy Rockhill
Renton High School Class 1947

**In-Kind Contributions**
Cat’s Eye Group
Susie Bressan (beverages for the Benefit Dinner)
Robin Baches (flowers for the Benefit Dinner tables)

**Contributions through**
Renton Community Foundation
John & Eleanor Bertagni

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**Join the Renton Historical Society Today!**

Name: __________________________________________________________
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**Please make checks payable to the Renton Historical Society.**

VISA/MASTERCARD # _________________ Ex.Date: ____________

**Your Signature: ________________________________________________**

☐ Please share your e-mail address with us: _________________________
☐ Please send me a volunteer application form. (32/1)

Mail To: Membership Secretary, Renton Historical Society
235 Mill Avenue South, Renton, Washington 98057-2133

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Please Choose Membership Category & Any Donation You Wish To Make:

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(partially tax deductible) ________
☐ General Fund Donation ________
☐ Endowment Fund Donation ________

In Memory of:

**Total enclosed: ________________**
Obituary Collected
(May 1 through August 1)

- Evelyn F. Anderson
- Michael S. Ballard
- Larry A. Becker
- A. Ken Beckwith
- Michael E. Brown
- Vivian Nelson Cook
- Bobbi L. O’Brien Denzer
- Ryan Eley
- William R. Favro
- Patrick J. Findlay
- Ivana M. Flynn
- Adolph Garbarino
- Rutha “Lorene” Graves
- Lynn Evelyn (McCready) Gregg
- Rudolph Hanson, Jr.
- Edward Hedlund
- Frances “Kim” Hilton
- Claude Hisey
- Zillah Joyce Hollis
- Charlotte D. Jasper
- Ruth L. Johnson
- Margaret Klepach
- Ervin R. Metzger
- Iola Delores Nelson
- Mary C. O’Brien
- Camille Pinchetti
- Barbara O’Keefe
- Dorothy M. Pistlesi
- Shirley Mae Tompkins
- Thomas C. Tobacco
- Margaret Wales
Rentonians Remembered

Evelyn Anderson
Clayton & Jan Ginnett; Barbara Smith; Helen Ockwig

Bill Beck
Katie Gilligan

A. Ken Beckwith
Dan & Gloria Cartwright; Carrie & Greg Bergquist

Virginia Shook Busato
Hazelle DuBois

Tim Chinn
Hazelle DuBois

Vivian Nelson Cook
Rachel Thomas; John & Eleanor Bertagni; Durwood & Dolores Blood; Beth & Mike Potoshnik; Robert & Gilda Youngquist; Delores Daly; Vicki & Chris Thomas; Mike & Joy Cafferty; Jack & Lois Gannon; Pat Hardie Borek; Peggy Hansen; Bert & Evy Nord; June Hewitt; John Burroughs, Betsy Mann & Bill & Debbie Keppler; Richard & Corinne Lucotch; Homer & June Dolen

Florence Damon Culp
Duane & Marilyn Clise

Bobbi O’Brien Denzer
Sharon & Ron Clymer; Maridy Roper

Rose Donovan
Richard & Corinne Lucotch

Charles B. DuBois, Sr.
Hazelle DuBois

Elizabeth Swales Dubois
Hazelle DuBois

Ryan L. Eley
Carrie & Greg Bergquist

Marvin Snowberger
Katie Gilligan

Thomas Tobacco, Jr.
Sharon & Ron Clymer; Maridy Roper

Memorials
$100 & Over

Neddie Rose
Dragin Farrington
Patricia Hardie Borek & Betty Hardie Morgan, Olga Azzola

Elizabeth Fairman
Inez Edlich

Vivian Cook
Janie & Bowen Scarff
Teresa & Van Campbell
Mike & Diana Brown & family
Helen M. Lee

Margaret Klepach
Manney
Ellen Sandbo, Jim Klepach, Fran Klepach
In Hindsight...

Halloween Party at Central School, 1908 (#1966.000.1005)