

# Officers Row Memories Oral History Project

Pat Jollota

Project Role: Advocacy and education



Interviewed November 5, 2024 at the Marshall House, Vancouver, Washington, by Madeline Hagan, historian with Historical Research Associates

*This interview transcript has been edited for clarity and brevity. To view the entire interview on YouTube, [click here](#).*

Madeline Hagan: Please introduce yourself.

Pat Jollota: My name's Pat Jollota. My first job here in Vancouver was in the Grant House Museum, as a curator. When they turned the Grant House into a restaurant, they turned me into a politician. I served on the city council then for 20 years. A main interest of mine, of course, is historic preservation. It's a win sometimes -- lose more often -- situation.

I came originally from—shudder—Los Angeles, where I served for 21 years in the Los Angeles Police Department. When my husband and I retired, we moved first to England, where we managed a small hotel, and then here to Vancouver. We had bought land here in '75, but we moved here in '82. I went to work at the Grant House, and when they turned the museum there into a restaurant, I became a curator at the Clark County Historical Museum and did 20 years there. I have a 20-year attention span.

MH: Why did you move to Clark County?

PJ: It was a logical arithmetic decision. My husband and I were looking for a place where I could help in historic preservation. We made a list of the things that were important to us. I had watched Los Angeles destroy its past and what it became. I wanted to go somewhere where maybe I could help stop that. It took us two years to find Vancouver. We came here in '75, loved it, and bought 12 acres, and then went back to LA.

MH: What preservation potential did you see in Vancouver and Clark County?

PJ: At first, downtown Vancouver. It was ugly. It was dismal. It was card rooms and pawn shops, bookstores, and taverns but you could see the bones of a beautiful city there. It would just take a little work to preserve. Once I was on the city council, of course, I realized how hard that is to do but how necessary it really is for the soul of the city.

MH: Tell me about when you started working for the Clark County Historical Society. How did you enmesh yourself in Clark County history?

PJ: A gentleman named David Freece was the executive director of both the Grant House and Clark County museums. He encouraged me, number one, to find out about the Grant House. I studied that in depth so I could lead tours through that museum. When it closed, I went to the Clark County Historical Museum with David. We had the entire collection of *Columbian* newspapers at that time. Hardbound. Great, huge volumes. When it was slow at the museum, I would grab a year, and

read it. I began to know the people and know the enmities, the quarrels, the romances. How things worked.

Then of course we had the museum's photo collection, which is marvelous. Gradually whole stories began to form. So, I wound up writing eight books about Clark County. It's a fascinating story here.

MH: What's so fascinating about it?

PJ: We had Lewis and Clark here. We had Native Americans here. We had the Hudson's Bay Company here. We had the Army here. We were a part of the end of the Oregon Trail. All layered in one place across time with all the history interacting.

MH: How did Officers Row fit into that mix?

PJ: Well, number one, it was gorgeous. Number two, I was working on the Row in the Grant House, which represented the growth of the Army here. The Grant House is a log cabin. We see here this magnificent mansion for the commanding officer, and then another one for O.O. Howard. You can see photographs where the other original log cabins were removed and houses put in.

MH: When you first started working at the Grant House, did you recognize the importance of Officers Row to the greater Vancouver community?

PJ: Not at the very first. I only realized it when we were threatened with its loss when the government was going to auction off the buildings. There's this wonderful panorama of houses and trees and lawn, and the open space between these marvelous houses. The little houses were for the lower rank officers. As you climbed in rank, you got a better house and then another better house. That was what really brought the area home to me. My son was the commander of the aviation branch of the Mechanical Engineering Program at West Point. Although he was a warrant officer, he got a colonel's house, which I thought was wonderful.

The first American troops to fight in Asia left here under the command of General Anderson. All of that history and the troops here were involved in it. We had a prisoner of war camp here in WWII.

MH: Can you go into detail about the potential loss of the Row? What was going on at the time?

PJ: There were others like me. Fortunately, one was Don Bonker, congressman. I joined Don Bonker's committee to pressure the government to let the city buy the houses on the Row. They were too important to lose. Bryce Seidl the mayor, formed a committee with the same purpose. We joined those committees together, and we lobbied, we pestered, we annoyed our elected officials in Washington, DC. We demanded. We pled. We converted Senator Slade Gordon, who became a strong proponent for us. Oh, we telephoned. We sent post cards. We sent petitions. We got many, many citizens on our side. Of course, there were the ones who screamed "boondoggle" and "waste of money and tear the old houses down, they're no good for anyone."

After all the advocacy, we were in a meeting of our committee in city hall. The mayor was in Washington, DC., and he called and said, "I have good news and I have bad news. The good news is, we have the Row. For a dollar. The bad news is, we have the Row. We have 21 white elephants marching nose to tail down Evergreen, and now our challenge is what to do with them." Now we

had the Row. The city already had this house, Marshall House. The Red Cross was in it for a long time. We started having public meetings -- you know, the post-what-you-want-on-the-wall kind of a thing. There were many suggestions. One was to move all the houses in a circle, so they'd be easier to walk to. There were those who wanted them all museums and shops.

What it came down to was the city had a choice between high-income, high-risk or low-income, low-risk. They decided to turn them into commercial and residential spaces. Get the lower income, but steady income, because we had 21 white elephants that needed repair and restoration.

They decided that the Grant House Museum should be a high-end men's club. Well, they found out that Vancouver really wasn't ready for a high-end men's club. That's not our style here. So it switched over to a restaurant. And I protested. I went to a city council meeting. What are you going to do with the wonderful military collection in that museum? This is the oldest house on the Row, 1849. You're going to turn it into a restaurant?

Well, I was treated rudely, actually. I came home from a city council meeting and I'm throwing things, I'm so mad. Throwing my purse. My husband said, "Hold on a minute! Don't take it out on me. If you want to change policy, you have to be a policy maker." Oh. Yeah. And I went to the next city council meeting and a wonderful lady, Rose Besserman, came up to me. She said, "Pat, we're not discussing the Row or the Grant House tonight."

I said, "I know. I'm not a single-issue person." It was something to do with the police department.

And she said, "Well, until you're on city council, you're always a one issue person." Second "oh."

So, I ran for city council. I lost. Being a political naif, I ran against an eight-year incumbent. Male. Baptist minister. But I took 48% of the vote. For a newcomer from California, that was pretty good. Two years later, a council member stepped down and I filed to run and took 70-something percent.

Really a mandate. And my two things to this day are heritage preservation and public safety. I think of those, public safety, of course, is primary.

They did close the Grant House Museum. And then, horror of horrors, a dresser that Grant had used, its quartermaster number traced back to him, they were using that to put the hot plates on. A portrait of William Troup, renowned riverboat captain, was hanging on the wall in the dining room and subject to the volatile oils from cooking. They took all of the military brass and polished it to an incredibly high glow. Which of course removed the finish. To discount my efforts, they brought in the curator of the Pittock Mansion, who walked around the house with the city council. And he said, "Unfortunate use. Oh, no, that should not be here." Everything that I had complained about, he backed me up. And the manager of the restaurant said, "There would be no oily air."

And the museum curator said, "Well, you're crazy. There are always volatile oils when you're cooking." So, they redid all that. That made the papers. I think that helped me get elected.

MH: So, when the city gets 21 white elephants - what do you do about funding?

PJ: Oh, you get grants. You hijack funds from other sources. We had, at that time, some wonderful philanthropists in our community. Ed Lynch, George Propstra, Robert Hidden. These people who

wanted to preserve what we had. They helped. First thing was roofs. Then there was a controversy over the color the houses should be painted. Being here is almost like living in a postcard. You step out on the porch here and you see the vista of this great parade ground. You can't see the fort from here, but you can see the barracks and the magnificent trees. As the trees aged and died they were replaced by various groups, by schools. There are little plaques under them that show who was responsible for that tree. Now they're mature trees. Vancouver is a unique place.

MH: Before the rehabilitation project, was there a historic preservation community in Vancouver?

PJ: The historical society, basically.

Vancouver was a very small town in 1942. In four months, we went from 18,000 to about 43,000 because of the shipyards. The people of Vancouver thought, this is great. They're all going to come in, and just like World War One, they're going to be here for a year or two and then they'll go home. Great. Grab the money. Well, the WWII lasted longer. And the wages were so high—I mean, a buck seventy-five an hour, wow. You could buy a house and five acres for five thousand dollars.

So, the new people began to settle, and their kids started school here. They married and had kids. At the end of the war, many went home, but many more stayed. They weren't particularly interested in the history of Vancouver. They were here for a job, schools, houses. They didn't care. Their children were taught the history of where their parents came from. because the parents didn't care about here. So, that was all lost. They grew up, became elected. Became leaders. Started businesses. And when it came time to preserve an area, there was no interest. It was old. Get rid of it. They tore down 40 acres of homes of the leaders of Vancouver without even thinking. Just leveled them, thinking that they would quickly fill with factories and buildings. Well, they didn't. But that wonderful history was lost. So much was lost during that era.

Then, as their children matured with a love for the town, there's the complete opposite. Now these kids knew Vancouver history. They knew what their parents did when they were kids here. The interest in saving it became greater.

MH: Do you think that the rehabilitation of Officers Row inspired anyone in the Vancouver area to become a historic preservationist? Was there a renewed interest in the historic fabric of Vancouver?

PJ: I think there was a renewed interest. It undoubtedly inspired others. Even today—I'll confess it—I'm an admin on a Facebook page, and I tell a historic tale every day. Just a little unimportant item, you know, okay, here was C.J. Moss's bicycle shop, you know. Just little things, trying to keep that inspiration. Trying to get the young ones to realize that history is fun. So, when they grow up, they'll teach their children.

MH: How has Officers Row featured in your books?

PJ: Oh my goodness. Oh, the ghost stories book particularly.

MH: Tell me about that.

PJ: All of the ghosts. Yes. There have been reports of a ghost in the back of this house. A young soldier did indeed commit suicide in the back of the house. You also hear a distant sound of drums

and bugles at times. The Grant House, of course, has ghosts. The ghost of General Sully, who died in the house. A very sad and melancholy man. We even had a psychic come from Portland for one of the TV stations. She went all around the house. It was really fun.

One thing we did that was fun as far as the ghosts go, was have Ghost Stories on Officers Row. We had walking tours coming down the Row at night, and people dressed up as the ghosts at each house. You would tell all the stories as we walked along. It was just fun and it was so popular. It kept growing, it kept growing. Then they had to bring in music—it just got too big and too complicated and too expensive and it went away. I think if we'd just kept it that small little fun Halloween prank kind of event, I think we'd still be doing it.

MH: When you were on the council, what historic preservation issues came across your desk?

PJ: The Monterey Hotel was one, and the Wolf Building. I really wept when it came down. A very beautiful building with wolf heads across the top. The owners had put up aluminum fronts. You know, being modern, but underneath was still that. The owner—it was a card parlor—wanted to put a dinner theater upstairs. He broke the main structural beam, and basically broke the back of the building. Then the voters ended gambling, and he didn't bother to fix the building. He just walked away and abandoned it. Bricks were falling out of it. There was no question that it could not be saved. I really shed a tear over that building, because it could have been stunning.

The Monterey Hotel, though newer, was also long a part of downtown. I was on another board at that time, which was The Arc of Clark County, serving people with developmental disabilities. Many of them lived in the Monterey. The electricity of course was very outdated. They had extension cords running under the carpets and that sort of thing. We did save other buildings downtown.

MH: Did any challenges come up during the Officers Row financing?

PJ: Many. Water pipes. Gas pipes for lighting that were still hooked up. Window coverings! Venetian blinds. Oh my gosh. Then there were shutters. Oh, just every single thing had an issue. They found out the Grant House was built on a foundation of logs. The biggest log was under the front door, which was the most heavily used part of the building. Fortunately, we were able to jack it up and put a solid foundation under it and save it. Thank heavens.

As the mayor said, 21 white elephants. But we chose as a community to use this site to preserve history, teach the history of the military which was here for so long. Because of that and the way we had cared for and treated these houses, we got the Howard House with no problem whatsoever.

MH: What is the legacy of Officers Row?

PJ: For one, that we were recognized as a city. Our low-risk, low-income policy has kept the Trust going as caretaker because it's a steady, steady income. People really want to live on the Row. People really want to live in the barracks. And it's the quietest, safest place in town.

MH: How do you envision the future of Officers Row?

PJ: In my heart I see it continuing to survive, to be maintained. That funding is found to really keep it.

MH: What is your favorite part of Officers Row?

PJ: It's all of it. It's the feeling, the feeling of serenity when you're here. That everything's okay now. Here, you can hear birds. Distant sound of traffic. It's just the sense of being that you find here. More than just one of the buildings. It's the gestalt of the whole thing. What can you say about a place like this? You've got the shipyards down there, you've got the history of aviation. You've got the fort, you have the Hawaiians. You have the Army. It's a place like no other. No other in the whole country. It just is.