

# Officers Row Memories Oral History Project

Ann Roseberry

Role in Project: One of the first residents of Officers Row after rehabilitation



Interviewed November 4, 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: I am interviewing Ann Roseberry. Ann, would you please introduce yourself?

Anne Roseberry: My name is Ann Roseberry. I'm a librarian.

MH: You were one of the first residents after the rehabilitation. How did you find out about the opportunity to live here?

AR: We'd moved here to Vancouver. I worked at the regional library. At some point, maybe through *The Columbian*, I read that the buildings were being rehabbed and were going to be rented. I was calling the city at least once a month. "Are they ready? When are they going to be ready?" I just thought they were so cool.

MH: Are you from Vancouver?

AR: No. I grew up on the east side, in Richland.

MH: How did you end up in Vancouver?

AR: I interviewed at the American Library Association conference with Fort Vancouver Regional Library and took that job.

MH: Have you always been interested in historic buildings?

AR: Yes. When we were little, our folks would take us places, particularly Walla Walla and Spokane where they had friends, to show us older houses and show us that not all houses were exactly the same. Richland was built similarly to an army base with lots of the same building plans. We just loved the old buildings.

MH: Did you lived in an old building when you first moved to Vancouver?

AR: No. We lived in an apartment on Boise Court, and then another apartment complex. That's where we were when I was haunting this project.

MH: What do you think it was that drew you in so heavily?

AR: The setting. The houses were amazing. The big trees.

MH: So, you had come to the site before the rehabilitation?

AR: Yes.

MH: What was it like before rehabilitation?

AR: A little bit shabby. Not abandoned, but not cherished. And no energy to it.

MH: Tell me about the first month after you moved in.

AR: We were just so excited. Our building had two front apartments, and then a sideways one in the middle, and then in the back there were two. We moved into one of those. From the front door, you'd walk into the main floor, and then upstairs to the bedrooms. We had a basement. It was all very tidy and compact. The renovation had been done beautifully. The quality of the paint work was really, really high. You had these big windows. I remember just absolute delight. Somehow everything about this place fit for us, or we fit it.

MH: And so other people were moving in at the same, around the same time. Were they similar to you? Were they history lovers?

AR: Not really. I remember a young single woman, maybe even my age-ish. We liked each other and we'd have tea back and forth and things like that. In the center was a couple who were retired. He had worked for Jantzen. This was just an apartment for them while they had a house being built down on the river. All nice people, and we socialized. Across from us was a woman who had two adult sons. We weren't close friends but it was a comfortable neighbor relationship. We were kind of all different but when there were outdoor activities or anything happening around, you know, everybody was out and talking and stuff. So, friendly but not close.

The fireworks were amazing. The woman who lived in front invited us to come up to sit on her porch. And as I recall, drink copious amounts of wine because we were going to be walking back to our apartment. It was really ideal. You're just right here because this is where you live.

The Veterans Day parade was always really moving to me. At the time, there was still a World War One veteran. I'm getting chills even now. It was just very moving to me. Then there were a lot of people getting married. You'd look out and just see them, maybe using the gazebo or the lawns. Even if it was just people walking, or kids or picnics, it felt good. It felt like real life.

MH: How do you think that the rehabilitation fit into the larger Vancouver community?

AR: I think it was very important. I'm trying to remember what else was going on at the time. It was way before the waterfront development. There were a couple of restaurants down that way and a Red Lion, but not something that somebody would come from Portland for. Vancouver was pretty undiscovered at that point. This was something special and different that people would come see. Historic national park. Suddenly there was this pretty big space that was really cool, historic space, but also active space. It was alive again. I think it was of critical importance. It was part of what kept the Vancouver downtown alive, which is so important in urban, semi-urban areas.

MH: Do you think it still holds that purpose?

AR: I think so. I say that from my perspective of coming here from across the state and driving around a little bit to see what has changed. Vancouver is so much more polished now. I'm told that there are some really good restaurants that people will come from Portland to go to. Back in the '80s that did not happen. In fact, I was over at PSU after I left the Vancouver library. People would say, "No, you have to come to us. I can't go all the way to Vancouver." It was somehow out in the wilds. There were high school theatrics and that kind of stuff but people just didn't come here for it. Vancouver's a very different place now. Back then it still had that slightly post-World War Two feel to it, where some of the old Vancouver families were still the power structure. It was just starting to change but it was still a little bit sleepy.

MH: It's interesting the perception of Vancouver at that time, that people weren't coming here from Portland. Now, I think that there's a lot more exchange.

AR: There's so much more. I think people come now because awareness of Vancouver's a little bit more elevated.

MH: How many years did you live on the Row?

AR: We lived there, I think for eight years. We would have stayed longer except my CPA said, "If you do not buy a house, I am going to fire you. I will not do your taxes." I did not want to move. I really loved it here, but I respected her. We moved just over on the other side, just off Marine Drive.

MH: Did you move into a historic house?

AR: No, our house was one of three rowhouses that were infill.

MH: What did your husband think of Officers Row?

AR: Oh, he loved it, too. He really did love it. What I discovered once we moved, though, and we owned, was that he really loved gardening. So, he spent a lot of time in the little backyard. Because it was infill, there was almost zero organic material in the backyard. He started working on building up the soil and making it something and gardening. I don't think he wanted to leave here, but it made him really happy to have a garden.

MH: Can you tell me about what rent was like?

AR: I was trying to remember that. I think it might have been something like \$880 a month. I think after we bought the house, our mortgage payment was around \$1100.

MH: Did the rent feel comfortable?

AR: Super comfortable. We were two income, though not big money. I was a public employee and he worked for a private corporation. Certainly plenty to live on.

MH: Did you feel there was a diversity of incomes amongst the other tenants?

AR: Probably medium-ish. People seemed to be comfortable.

MH: What were some of your best memories living on the Row?

AR: Actually, having my family come visit, and friends. It was a small unit but super good for entertaining. It just worked really well. And in a way, maybe just sitting on our porch, and having a cup of coffee. The quiet times. Or having family here for Christmas or Thanksgiving. Somehow a small kitchen worked just fine for that. They felt like homes.

The Fourth of Julys in a way were the most fun in terms of the public things. Got a little wild and crazy but not scary or anything like that. The grounds were immaculate. You didn't have to do anything. In fact, there were really big, serious rules about maybe you weren't even supposed to have anything on your porch. The historic appropriateness rules were really strict at first. Nothing that ever bothered me. But, really strict.

MH: Do you remember any of the other rules?

AR: The curtains. The curtains had to be approved. You couldn't paint. Because of the tall ceilings and the light colors and the big original windows, the vista outside was something green and beautiful everywhere you looked.

MH: What did your guests think of the house?

AR: My folks loved it and my sisters did, too.

MH: Do you have any bad memories of being on the Row?

AR: Well, not really bad, exactly. But there was the night of the Fourth of July when there were people who were leaving who were, hmm, apparently in need of facilities which were not available. So, we took our car to the car wash the next day.

Nothing bad with the neighbors. We felt super safe here and it was quiet. We're not particularly noisy people. We lived for many years without a television. We weren't playing Led Zeppelin really loud or anything like that.

MH: I want to go back a second to some of the rules. Do you remember who was setting those rules?

AR: I don't know. The two on-site managers were enforcing them. They were very strict about it. We never broke any, fortunately. But I remember particularly one manager saying that there had been people who'd tried to change out the curtains or put things on their porch. I do remember that you could not put on exterior storm windows or anything like that. There must have been others. I did have an absolute panic the day I dropped a can of Dr. Pepper on the carpet because that stained, but we got that taken care of. It was about protecting an historic building, and also protecting the area. A whole lot of money went into refurbishing the buildings. Everything was very well thought out, and really high-quality work was done.

MH: Do you remember anybody complaining about the rules?

AR: I think we were all pretty compliant.

MH: You remember that the windows were original. Do you remember any of the other details around that really stuck with you? Was there original woodwork?

AR: The frames around doors and windows, and baseboards. All of those had been removed, completely sanded, and then painted very carefully. All of that was still there. That was so cool. You had these traditional accents that were still there.

MH: Have you followed Officers Row? You left after eight years. How often did you come back to visit? Did you at all?

AR: Not very often. From here we went across the river to Portland, and we were there until 2006. So, we were still in the area. But you know, once you live in Portland, you're really Portland-oriented. My husband's job was there, and I was at Portland State and then later down in Sherwood. We'd go downtown for theater and music. We'd go downtown for restaurants. It wasn't that I never came over here but there just weren't very many reasons. We would sometimes just drive through and say how beautiful it is.

MH: After your house, the house that you moved to after Officers Row, where did you guys go from there?

AR: Well, I went back to Richland, where I grew up. My dad had passed away, and my mom was there, and she did not want to leave. She got there in 1948, right after the war. She was still in the house that she and my dad moved into the day they got married. My sisters and I knew that eventually one of us would have to move back to Richland, and it just happened that a job came up for me first. I was interested in it because it was not just a library job but a building project, and I had just finished a building project in Sherwood. Turned out that I loved building library buildings more than anything in the world. We kept the house here for another seven years because his job was still here. We had a bit of a commuting marriage for a while. When his job was starting to go to part time, we really couldn't quite justify two houses anymore.

MH: Have you been in Richland since?

AR: Yes. What turned out was that my husband loves the climate for gardening. And, lest I sound like some sort of dweeb, starting in 1976, he came to where I was for my job, and found a job for himself. So, just kind of thought it might be his turn to choose where we lived. It is genuinely okay but I miss this area and the climate. But he loves his tomatoes. And this is important. And this is one of the ways that you stay together for forty plus years is you value the tomatoes.

MH: How do you think your time on Officers Row has impacted the rest of your life? Big question.

AR: It was just so ideal for us at the time. It was very beautiful, with a kind of a serene feeling. A long while ago, I was curious and did a little bit of research at the time. As I recall, there were only two or three other places in the country where what had been a military base had been transformed in this way. So, this is not just special, but maybe extraordinary.