

**A HISTORY OF THE  
BELLINGHAM NATIONAL GUARD ARMORY  
525 N. State Street, Bellingham, WA 98225**

**By Taylor Russell**

**All pictures courtesy of the Whatcom Museum's Photo Archives**

For thousands of years, the area surrounding Bellingham Bay was inhabited by the Coast Salish people. Local tribes such as the Lummi Indians made use of the natural waterways and abundant resources, like trees and fish. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Euro-American settlers were attracted to these same resources and the Bay's convenient location between the burgeoning metropolises of Vancouver, Victoria, and Seattle. The first permanent settlers, Captains Henry Roeder and Russell Peabody, arrived in December 1852 and opened a mill at Whatcom Creek. The environment and demographics rapidly changed as more mills and lumberyards, mines, and fish canneries sprouted along the shore, serviced by well-connected trade and transportation networks. Four separate towns developed around the bay, fueled in part by the miners, settlers, and entrepreneurs en route to the Fraser Canyon goldfields in nearby British Columbia.



**Fort Bellingham, built in 1856.**

the first instance of a national military presence in the Bellingham area. Though it was closed in 1863, the fort set a precedent for the importance of coastal defense and military training in the region that would be reflected in later arguments for the construction of the Armory.<sup>1</sup>

After Fort Bellingham was dismantled and the soldiers moved to other towns in the San Juan Islands, local volunteer militias sprang up to deal with the “Indian problem.” The militias, usually comprised of gun-owning settlers with various levels of military training, were also called upon to deal with labor riots. By the 1880s, the informal volunteer militias had been organized as the Washington Territorial Militia which would be transformed into the Washington National Guard when Washington was granted statehood in 1889.<sup>2</sup>

As the state of Washington and the cities of Puget Sound developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, so too did the militias. After the success of the Philippine War in 1898, newly elected president Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) set out to restructure the military. The United States Army had historically been very small, with state militias providing the

<sup>1</sup> Janet Oakley, “Captain George Pickett begins construction of Fort Bellingham on August 26, 1856,” *HistoryLink* [http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&File\\_Id=7098](http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&File_Id=7098)

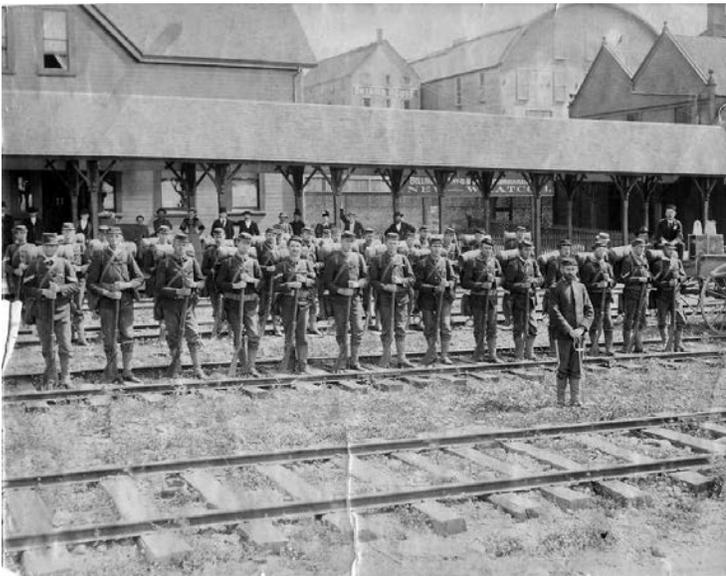
<sup>2</sup> “Historic Structures Evaluation Report for Facilities of the Washington Army National Guard,” Washington Army National Guard, November 2005; Virgil F. Field, *The Official History of the Washington National Guard, Vols. 1-7*.

As more and more settlers flooded the Puget Sound area, Coast Salish people, many travelling from distant Canadian and Russian territories, frequently attacked the new town sites, disrupting Euro-Americans' industries. This motivated the United States government to build military strongholds in the Northwest to protect the many settlements, like those at Port Townsend, Whidbey Island, and Bellingham Bay, from Indian attacks. In 1856, the US Army sent Captain George Pickett to build Fort Bellingham to defend the resources and developing towns on the bay. The fort would be

majority of troops and boasting four times the personnel strength of the Army.<sup>3</sup> Roosevelt's 1903 Militia Act federalized the state militias and officially renamed them the National Guard, which served as a reserve force for the US Army. The Act also resulted in the training, organization, and deployment of troops becoming more professional and standardized.

In the Pacific Northwest, a reliable supply of well-trained troops was needed to staff the newly-constructed coastal defense fortifications lining the Pacific Coast and Puget Sound. Near to Bellingham Bay was the formidable "Triangle of Fire" – Fort Casey, Fort Warden, and Fort Flagler – which defended against an invasion of Admiralty Inlet and the naval shipyard at Bremerton. Armories in towns along the coastlines were used to supplement the coast defenses, providing training and accommodation for the various National Guard companies manning the Forts.<sup>4</sup>

In 1904, the four small towns surrounding Bellingham Bay (Whatcom, Sehome, Fairhaven, and Bellingham) coalesced into the official incorporated City of Bellingham, Washington, becoming the fourth largest city in the state. Strategically located near the Canadian border and the aforementioned Triangle of Fire, Bellingham thought it was deserving of a National Guard armory. In a 1907 bill, the three largest cities, Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane, received funding to build armories. The committee on military affairs who voted on the bill had specifically left Bellingham out after Adjutant-General Otis Hamilton gave a poor review of Bellingham's local guard. Hamilton argued that Bellingham needed at least two companies to merit an armory and their existing company was in bad shape as it was.<sup>5</sup>



**Company M soldiers and Colonel John J. Weisenburger preparing to leave for the Spanish American War, May 1895.**

For the 20 years since its organization in 1890 by Colonel John J. Weisenburger, Bellingham's Company M had rented space in buildings throughout town, including the City Hall on Prospect Street and the back of the Fairyland Skating Rink on the northeast corner of Garden and Holly Streets. A December 1907 burglary at the Fairyland location resulted in a loss of guns, bayonets, and other articles valued at \$100. A week later, thieves again broke in and stole four revolvers valued at \$60. The newspapers described the robberies as a "carnival of crime" that proved the need for a more secure space. The September 1907 riots against East Indian laborers in the city, plus articles in the Bellingham Herald reporting that foreign influences were planning to invade America and "seize

<sup>3</sup> "Historic Structures Evaluation Report," Washington Army National Guard.

<sup>4</sup> Field, *The Official History of the Washington National Guard, Vols. 1-7*, 454, 458; Daryl C. McClary, "Triangle of Fire: The Harbor Defenses of Puget Sound (1897-1953)" *HistoryLink* [http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file\\_id=7524](http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=7524)

<sup>5</sup> "Bellingham May Not Secure Armory," February 6, 1907; "Still Fighting for Armory," February 19, 1907; "Bellingham Does Not Get Armory," February 26, 1907, *Bellingham Herald*.

the armory first,” fanned the flames of fear and encouraged support for the Bellingham Guard. A National Guard armory would be an imposing structure that would hopefully deter crime and unrest, as well as provide a larger training facility for Company M.<sup>6</sup>

In 1908, Captain Frank W. Radley promised to create a second company in order to get an armory. Radley also reorganized Company M and brought it to a “high state of efficiency” so it could become part of the Coast Artillery Reserve, providing troops for the Puget Sound forts. Adjutant-General Hamilton, who had previously been opposed to another armory, now concluded the Bellingham Guard was “one of the best in the state” and deserving of its own armory.<sup>7</sup>

In 1909 the State Legislature allocated \$75,000 for construction of a Bellingham armory, with work scheduled to begin in August 1910. Since the state militias were now part of the United States Army reserves, the Bellingham Guard would receive an additional \$25,000 in federal funding to purchase arms, weaponry, and other state of the art equipment. An armory commission was set up to negotiate contracts and supervise construction, with Radley as its leader. The commission’s first task was to choose a site for the armory. After looking at multiple properties, they chose a site at the top of the hill on Elk Street (renamed State Street in 1926), a prominent location in one of the city’s upper-class neighborhoods, with a view overlooking the city, bay, and San Juan Islands (see Appendix, Figure A). The Herald reported that the site had been bought by the county from the Bellingham Bay Improvement Company for \$5000 and declared it “one of the finest in the Northwest for armory purposes.”<sup>8</sup>



Captain Frank W. Radley

Over 40 architects submitted proposals for the construction of the Bellingham Armory and in the end the commission chose the Seattle architectural firm Blackwell & Baker.<sup>9</sup> The firm was headed by James Blackwell, who had “served his apprenticeship in the profession in the supervising architect’s office at Washington, D.C. so that he has a thorough acquaintance with fortress and barrack construction that has aided him materially in the present work.”<sup>10</sup> His partner, Frank Baker, was a “well-known armory designer” who had recently moved to Seattle from New York.<sup>11</sup> The construction was overseen by two men, contractor George McKenzie of Everett and architect T. F. Doan of Bellingham, who had worked together on other projects in the city, namely the Roeder School.<sup>12</sup> The Armory was designed in the castellated style, based on heavy stone work and featuring crenellated parapet walls. Most popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this distinctive style was used for armories and public buildings across America as its formidable array of imitation turrets and

<sup>6</sup> “Thieves Break Into Militia’s Stockade,” December 27, 1907; “Armory is Again Robbed,” January 8, 1908; “Sack City and Slaughter Police,” March 23, 1908, *Bellingham Herald*; Robert M. Fogelson, *America’s Armories: Architecture, Society, and Public Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> “Armory Crusade to be Conducted,” August 26, 1908; “Company M to Join the Reserves,” October 31, 1908; “Appropriation for Armory Will Be Urged,” December 10, 1908; “Combine May Capture,” January 14, 1909; “Captain Radley Given Credit for Armory Bill,” March 4, 1909, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>8</sup> “Bellingham Assured \$75,000,” January 21, 1909; “Armory to be Built on Elk Street,” January 16, 1910; “Coast Reserve Brings City \$100,000,” April 6, 1910; “Work on Armory to Start Soon,” May 15, 1910, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>9</sup> “Armory Plans to be Drawn,” March 23, 1910, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>10</sup> “Architects in Favor of Using Chuckanut Stone,” May 15, 1910, *Bellingham Reveille*.

<sup>11</sup> “Work on Armory to Start Soon,” May 15, 1910, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>12</sup> “Armory Work is Awarded to McKenzie,” July 23, 1910, *Bellingham Herald*.

battlements recalled castellated architecture of the Middle Ages, reflecting the structure's purpose as a defensive stronghold.<sup>13</sup> However, there were only a few castellated buildings built in the Pacific Northwest, such as the Portland (1891), Tacoma (1908), and Spokane Armories (1909). The Bellingham Armory was one of the last of its type to be built. Later armories often had more of a streamlined Art Deco style.

The architects and armory commission decided to use local sandstone from the Chuckanut Sandstone Company's quarry on Chuckanut Bay just south of the city limits. It was delivered by rail in large blocks that were then custom cut at the site. The Armory would be one of the last buildings to use the sandstone as the company closed in 1912. The quarry had initially been discovered shortly after Henry Roeder opened his mill at Whatcom Creek in 1852. While exploring the Chuckanut Bay shoreline, Roeder found a sandstone outcrop. He harvested the stone intermittently for the quarry's first few decades as demand was low, using the material in small projects like paved walkways at Fort Bellingham and foundations for a handful of other buildings in the San Juan Islands and Vancouver, BC area. In the 1880s through early 1900s, after a series of fires swept through major West Coast cities including San Francisco and Seattle, builders became interested in sandstone as a fire-proof material. The quarry was soon supplying stone to cities up and down the Pacific Coast, with a majority of it being used in Seattle and Bellingham. The Armory would join the list of Bellingham's impressive array of sandstone buildings, such as the Pike Block, Lighthouse Block, Roth Apartments, and City Hall. Unfortunately, many no longer exist but some buildings and private homes still have sandstone foundations and detailing, most notably in the Columbia and Lettered Streets neighborhoods and along Garden Street. The quarry eventually closed as it became unprofitable to compete with new building techniques employing cement and steel-framed brick.<sup>14</sup>



The driving of the golden spike for the Bellingham-Skagit interurban railway at the foot of today's McKenzie Avenue.

After a few months of excavation and foundation work, on November 10, 1910 the mayor of Bellingham declared a half-holiday, referred to as "Interurban Day." Businesses closed early and thousands of citizens flooded the streets to watch a parade celebrating the expansion and modernization of the city. The Bellingham Herald recorded, "With almost all of the stores and business houses closed during the afternoon hours and the most intense enthusiasm and interest manifested on the part of the citizens during the ceremony of the laying of the

armory cornerstone and the driving of the golden spike on the Bellingham-Skagit interurban railway, Interurban Day will be marked for years to come as one of the most important in the history of the city."<sup>15</sup> Residents took pride in the new venue, knowing the new Armory, the first military installment since Fort Bellingham, would rival those of larger cities like Seattle and Tacoma. The Puget Sound Artillery Military Band and the 106<sup>th</sup> Company of the Coast Guard Reserves,

<sup>13</sup> Fogelson, *America's Armories*, 149.

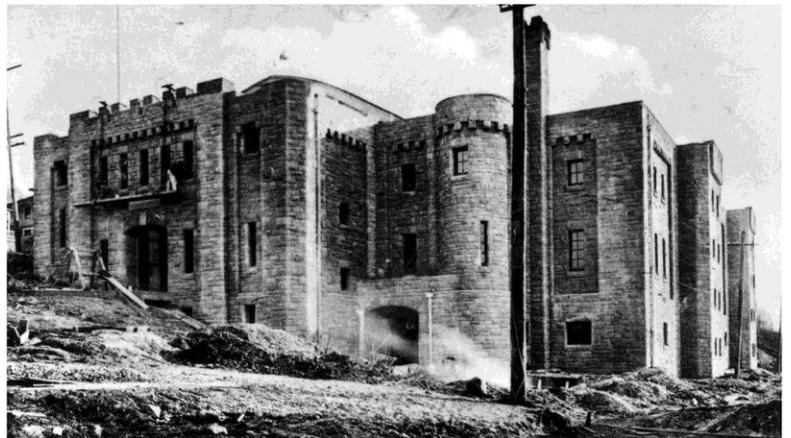
<sup>14</sup> Wes Gannaway, "The Chuckanut Sandstone Quarries: Foundation of the Pacific Northwest," *The Journal of the Whatcom County Historical Society* 7 (2007).

<sup>15</sup> "Cornerstone of Armory Swings into Place," November 10, 1910, *Bellingham Herald*.

led by Colonel G. N. Whistler who was commander of the Puget Sound Artillery District, traveled to Bellingham for the occasion. Accompanied by Captain Radley, Company M, and other prominent citizens, the group paraded across town to the new Armory site on Elk Street and, amidst speeches and music, the cornerstone was laid, containing a metal box of the rosters of the local company, the 106<sup>th</sup> and the officers of the local Masonic order, as well as photographs and copies of the day's newspapers.

Construction of the Armory got off to a slow start owing largely to delays in the quarrying of sandstone and concerns over Pine Street being regraded, which upset neighbors.<sup>16</sup> However, a far larger controversy with the Armory soon stole the headlines. Only a few weeks after the celebrations of Interurban Day, Radley resigned from the armory commission, accusing the contractor and architects of shoddy workmanship. He claimed that instead of using sandstone and brick for the walls, as the contract stated, the architects had decided to use smaller sandstones and fill the resulting gap with cement. Radley said the "carelessness" and "ignorance" of McKenzie and the architects had cost the state \$5000. T.F. Doan was temporarily suspended while Blackwell and Baker travelled north to investigate the charges. After examining the site and interviewing Doan and McKenzie,

Blackwell refuted the claims, alleging that Radley was trying to sabotage the operation since he was upset a local contractor and close friend, Martin Siersdorfer, had not won the contract. Siersdorfer specialized in stone and brick work and had an office near Pine Street; in 1913 he built a unique stone house just two blocks north of the Armory at 712/714 State Street.<sup>17</sup> Blackwell said the changes in construction had not affected the strength or integrity of the building and



**The Armory under construction.**

would actually save the state money. A week later, Blackwell felt the need to return to Bellingham after the Herald printed a slew of articles giving Radley free voice. Blackwell had a friend call Radley and falsely report that "something was going wrong at the building." When Radley arrived at the Armory site, Blackwell confronted him and the argument escalated into a physical fight. The Herald reported that Blackwell "beat Radley's face into pulp and then quietly left the city." Blackwell was charged with second-degree assault, but in court he plead guilty to third-degree, maintaining that his actions were a result of his "Southern breeding" where fighting to preserve one's honor was perfectly acceptable. The "sensational drama" ended with Blackwell paying a fine of \$200.<sup>18</sup> Radley, threatened by a court martial for accusing the commission of fraud, resigned from the National Guard in February 1911. A month later, he asked to be reinstated in hopes of participating in the Mexican Border War; his application was denied.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>"Future Home of Militia Progresses," October 2, 1910, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>17</sup>Lynette Felber, "An Economy of Space: Multifamily Housing and Repurposed Apartments," paper for Anthropology 528: Cultural Resource Management, Western Washington University, undated.

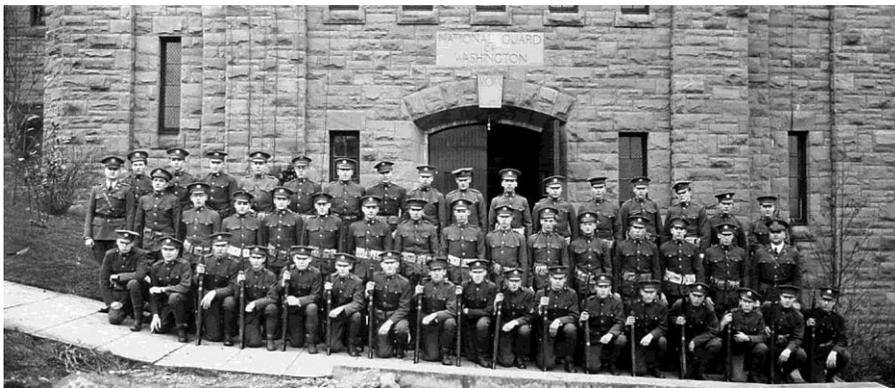
<sup>18</sup>"Armory Architect Roasts Radley," December 6, 1910; "Blackwell responds to charges by blows," December 14, 1910; "Blackwell's Fight Costs \$200," January 6, 1911, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>19</sup>"Radley Retires to Rank of a Private Citizen," February 11, 1911; "Radley Will Not Be Reinstated," March 11, 1911, *Bellingham Herald*.

Company M moved into their new facility in June 1911. At the end of the month, they hosted a grand military ball open to the public so that the whole town could see the Armory. The huge drill hall and the galleries above could seat 2,500 persons. In addition to the offices and library with dramatic views onto Bellingham Bay, the building featured locker rooms, a rifle range, and a gymnasium. The interior was finished in hand-worked slash grain fir and kept warm by a steam heating system and electrical lights throughout.<sup>20</sup>

The Armory was a popular place, hosting military and fundraising balls nearly once a month, with as many as 3,000 people in attendance. The Herald even mentioned indoor baseball games in the drill hall.<sup>21</sup> Just a few years after construction was finished, the Armory got even busier when the United States entered World War I in April 1917. The Bellingham National Guard, now with two companies of men under the command of a new captain, was busy with drills, rifle practice, and supply and troop coordination.

Historian Lottie Roeder Roth wrote of the local WWI effort, "Whatcom County has a war record of which any county in the United States might well be proud. It furnished more than three thousand men for the fighting forces of America. It went 'over the top' in answer to every call for financial aid. Its industries furnished food for the soldiers, built ships and



**An undated photo of Bellingham's National Guard outside the Armory.**

furnished lumber out of which other ships and airplanes and cantonments were constructed. During the nearly two years that America was an active participant in the great war, the people of this county seemed to have no other thought in mind, and every other interest was subordinated to that of 'Winning the War.'<sup>22</sup>

The first of the Bellingham area's draftees were scheduled to ship out in July 1917. The young men who made up the Coast Artillery Companies 2 and 9, many only 16 years old, were the "pride of Bellingham's heart" and earlier that month had headlined a Fourth of July street parade.<sup>23</sup> The companies were mobilized at the Bellingham Armory on July 24 and stayed for a few days, under intensive drill and rifle practice, in preparation for their transfer to Fort Casey. On July 30<sup>th</sup> a farewell service was arranged at the Armory, featuring speeches by Mayor Alex M. Muir and Reverend Duncan McPhail of the First Baptist church. The event was commemorated with bound books featuring profiles of all the enlisted men and words of encouragement from local businesses. Residents lined up along the city streets to watch as the 236 soldiers marched from the Armory down to the Citizen's Dock to board the steamer Kulshan which would carry them to Fort Casey on Whidbey Island; the Herald reported it was both "the saddest and at the same time the proudest day Bellingham

<sup>20</sup> "Architects In Favor of Using Chuckanut Stone," May 15, 1910, *Bellingham Reveille*; "Gym Outfit is Added to Armory," March 30, 1912, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>21</sup> "Boy is Injured by Fall at Armory," February 10, 1915, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>22</sup> Lottie Roeder Roth, *History of Whatcom County* (Seattle: Pioneer Historical Publishing Company, 1926), 631.

<sup>23</sup> "On Guard: Second and Ninth Companies WA Coast Artillery Corps, 1917" and *With the Colors from Whatcom, Skagit, San Juan Counties: An Honor Roll 1917, 18, 19*, compiled by Louis Jacobin (Seattle: Peters Publishing Company, 1921).

has ever experienced.”<sup>24</sup> In October 1917, a second smaller batch of 82 Bellingham recruits left en route to Camp Lewis, at what is today Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Tacoma, WA. Once again, the City of Bellingham organized a fitting send-off, declaring a public half-holiday, closing stores, and putting on a parade organized by the local Rotary.<sup>25</sup> (In February 1918, the *Tuscania* became the first ship carrying American soldiers to be sunk during the war. Hit by a German torpedo off the coast of Ireland, it was carrying over 2000 American troops, 55 of whom came from Bellingham’s companies 2 and 9. All but one of the Bellingham boys managed to swim ashore to the Irish coast.<sup>26</sup>)

After the war, the Armory was once again used frequently for military balls and other community social events (see Appendix, Figure C). In 1922, it was used for a “movie beauty contest” for babies. The Herald read, “There have been formal dancing parties, formal balls, marching soldiers and rallies on the floor of the armory, but perhaps no such noted gathering of future citizen of the nation was ever held than that which graced the big hall on Elk Street yesterday. Young men and women, ranging in age from 5 months to 3 years, roamed from door to door and the inspection that the state building got would have done credit to General Pershing himself, for there was not a corner or alcove that was left unsearched by the inquisitive eyes of the children. They were convened there for one purpose, and under the vigilant eyes of their mothers, big sisters and a few dads, they stood, walked, ran, toddled and crawled while waiting for the camera man to announce that their turn had come to be taken before the eye of the critical moving picture machine.”<sup>27</sup> The films were later shown at a local theatre and the winner received a toy doll. That same year, it was used for the coronation pageant of the Tulip Queen for the annual Tulip Festival, which had begun just two years earlier.<sup>28</sup>



**Colonel A.W. McMorris, with two unidentified men, looks over the site where the Motor Pool Shed would later be built, November 29, 1946.**

In 1935, Whatcom County donated the land just south of the Armory (four lots for a total of 49,500 square feet) for use as a parking lot which should "materially relieve congestion when the armory is used for public gatherings."<sup>29</sup> Later, in the 1950s, the Motor Pool Shed was built on the lot to house the National Guard’s expanding fleet of motor vehicles.

<sup>24</sup> “219 Local Soldiers Mobilized,” July 25, 1917; “Thousands Cheer Departing Soldiers,” August 1, 1917, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>25</sup> “Services to be Held,” July 27, 1917, *Bellingham Herald*; Roth, *History of Whatcom County*, 635.

<sup>26</sup> Roth, *History of Whatcom County*, 643.

<sup>27</sup> “200 Babies in the Herald’s Moving Picture Contest,” January 31, 1922; “Kiddies Rule Armory,” February 2, 1922, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>28</sup> “164 Will Appear in Coronation Pageant,” May 3, 1922; “Movie Men Coming,” April 27, 1922, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>29</sup> Field, *The Official History of the Washington National Guard, Vols. 1-7*, 645.

During WWII in the 1940s, the industries on Bellingham Bay were critical to the war effort in Washington State. Timber was needed to build ships and airplanes; coal to power machinery; and food supplies like canned salmon to keep the troops fed. The Armory played an important role as a strategic defense point in case these industries were threatened. The Bellingham Armory was also one of seven sites selected in the Pacific Northwest to host a civil defense plane spotting program. Under the jurisdiction of the United States Army's Aircraft Warning Service, filter centers were set up to detect enemy aircraft and report their movements to a military command center. The Bellingham Filter Center was established in August 1941 and training of volunteers began the following month. A "considerable number of rooms" in the Armory had been renovated and equipped with telephone systems, huge wall maps, and black-out curtains. The center, under the direction of Mrs. John P. Glinn, was staffed by over 150 female volunteers. Information was collected from volunteer aircraft spotters from all across the county. Using a large map and colored markers, the women tracked the location and movement of aircraft over



**Volunteers with the Aircraft Warning Service pose with their service awards.**

Whatcom, Skagit, and Island counties. They worked four hour shifts as "telephone operators, stenographers, plotters, and clerks." The center was deemed officially operational on December 8, 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor. Because of the urgency/seriousness of the situation, the center would remain open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week including during the winter holidays. The Red Cross and American Legion organized a transportation system to provide rides for the volunteers who had to work the odd hours when private or bus transport was not available. After a year of service, the center was lauded by army officers and state governor Arthur B. Langlie as "one of the best in the nation" and was encouraged to attract even more volunteers to its already 300-strong roster. To advertise their program, volunteers created a display in the windows of Newton's Apparel Shop on West Holly Street, showing a filter board surrounded by

mannequins representing each of the jobs the volunteers performed. After two years of service, the center closed abruptly in October 1943, most likely to free up military men who could be reassigned to combat duty. In total, an estimated 400 volunteers in Bellingham spent 180,000 hours volunteering for the Aircraft Warning Service at the Armory.<sup>30</sup>



**Senator Joseph McCarthy in attendance at the 1948 GOP Washington State Convention held at the Armory.**

By mid-century, Bellingham had a reputation as a "hotel city." In May of 1948, the city hosted the GOP Washington State Convention at the Armory (see Appendix, Figure G). The event was attended by notable

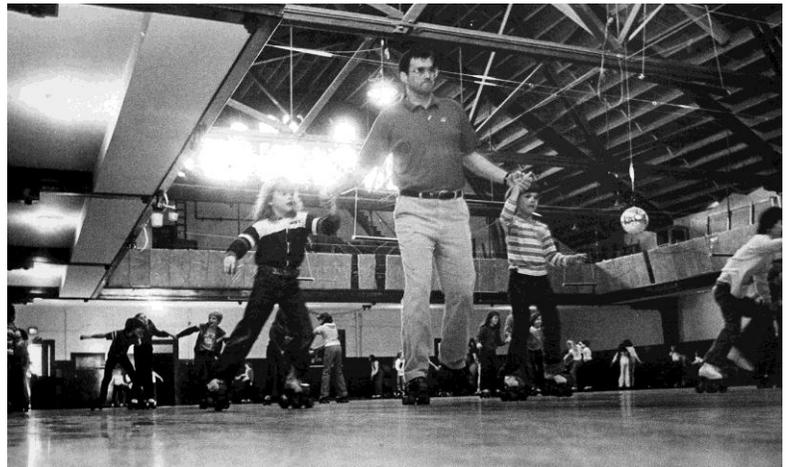
<sup>30</sup> Neill D. Mullen, "Aircraft Warning Service," in *Lest We Forget: Whatcom County, Aviation History 1941-1945* (Bellingham: Applied Digital Imaging, 2001).

Republicans of state and national fame, including Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose infamous Communist witch hunt had not yet begun.<sup>31</sup>

In the early 1950s, the National Guard was dropped from the federal reserves and went through a reorganization. Because of reduced training schedules, the Armory was used infrequently by the Bellingham Guard. In 1953, the drill hall was leased to Ted Bruland and converted into a public roller skating rink, which attracted some of the most famous roller skaters of the day (see Appendix, Figure K). During the 1950s and 1960s, the Armory was a popular place for events and activities, including Girl and Boy Scout gatherings, fundraising dances, dog shows, home shows, basketball games, and professional wrestling (see Appendix, Figure H).<sup>32</sup> It was also considered one of the best places in town to see live music.<sup>33</sup>

In 1972, the National Guard no longer needed the building. Having constructed a new facility on Williamson Way near the Bellingham airport, the Guard sold the building to Western Washington University for a grand total of \$1. The University used the top and basement floors for storage and continued to lease the main floor as a roller rink, now under the name Mead's Rolladium (see Appendix, Figure J).<sup>34</sup> The roller rink's lease was ended in September 1989 after the University decided it would be too expensive to replace the oak flooring which had been damaged by water leaking from the hillside and roof.<sup>35</sup> Though the public was outraged to lose the roller rink, the building not only needed repair but also upgrades that would cost millions of dollars.

While the University has considered alternative uses of the Armory, little has been done with the building because of the prohibitively high upgrade cost. In 2009, the University funded stabilization measures such as roof repair and hazardous material abatement. The basement area was used for a short time for prop and set design for the University's Theatre Department but today the Armory is used only for storage and referred to as the University's "attic."<sup>36</sup>



Roller skaters enjoy the Armory in the 1970s.

<sup>31</sup> "Vanguard of GOP Delegates Arrives in City," May 13, 15, 1948, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>32</sup> Dean Kahn, "Milestones: Fortress of memories: Bellingham Armory ripe for redevelopment," *Bellingham Herald*, February 24, 2008: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2008/02/24/329256/residents-share-their-armory-memories.html>

<sup>33</sup> Lance Lindell, "Historic Hotel Laube: A Monument to the Bellingham Music Scene 1960s-1990s," *The Journal of the Whatcom County Historical Society* 6 (2005): 11.

<sup>34</sup> Lease agreement

<sup>35</sup> Mary Lane Gallagher, "Historic Armory on Endangered List," May 24, 2006, *Bellingham Herald*.

<sup>36</sup> Gallagher, "Historic Armory on Endangered List."

**APPENDIX: Additional Historic Photos**



**Figure A: View looking northeast down Elk Street (later State Street) in 1889, near the site of today's Armory.**



Figure B: An early photo of the city of Whatcom's Company F, First Regiment, National Guard of Washington.



Figure C: Rotary Conference held in the Armory, May 19-22, 1935.



**Figure D: After the Guard is reactivated for WWII, men head to the Armory to re-enlist.**



**Figure E: Soldiers practice in the Armory's rifle range, undated.**



**Figure F: Bellingham Guard in lot next to Armory, 1944.**

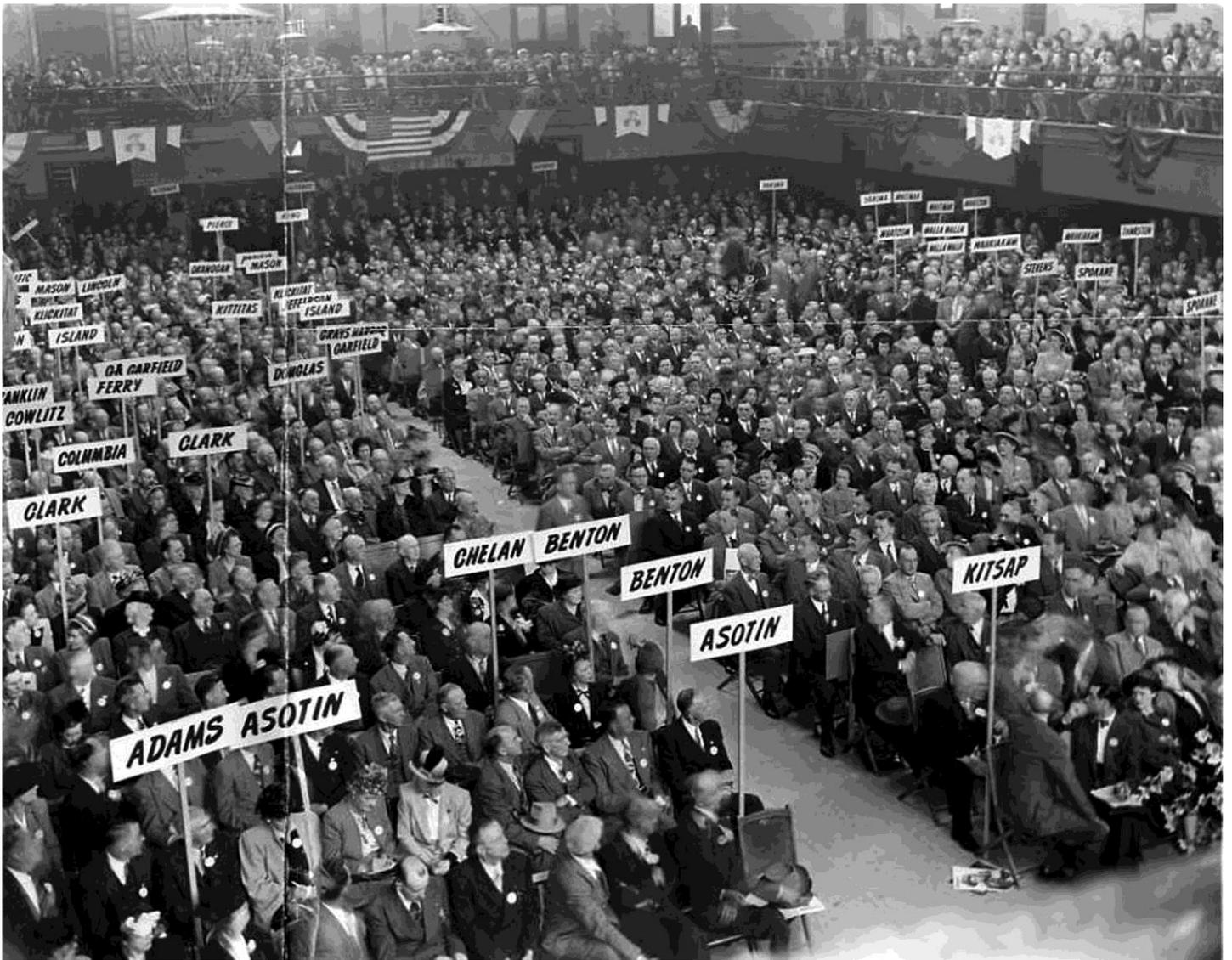


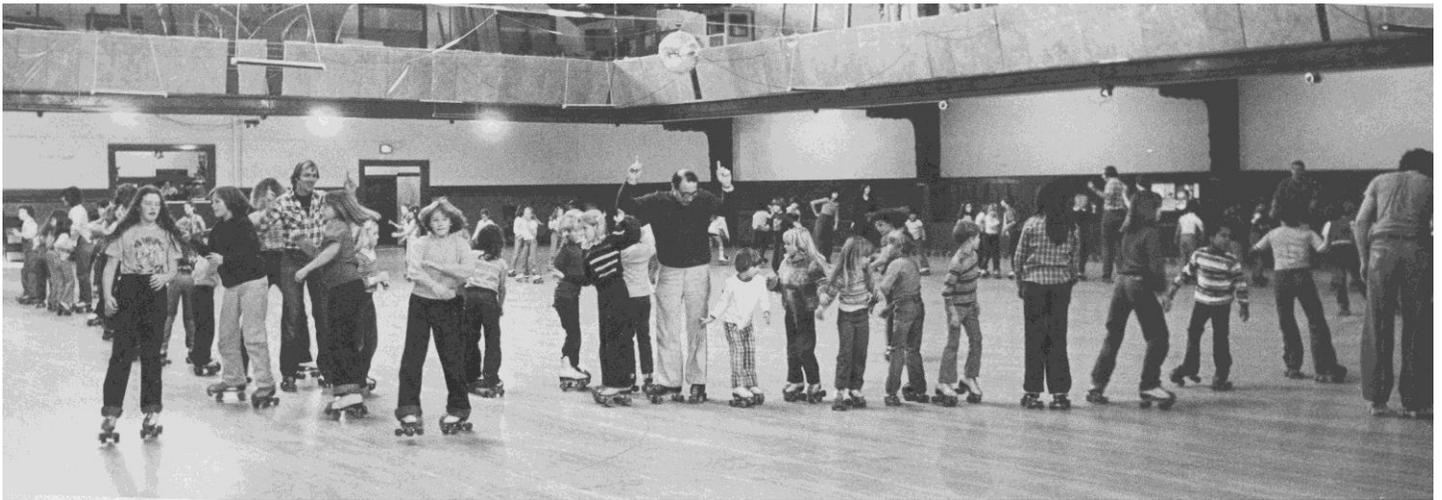
Figure G: Delegates sit according to county at the GOP Washington State Convention held at the Armory in May 1948 (in the middle of the photo is King County with the most representatives).



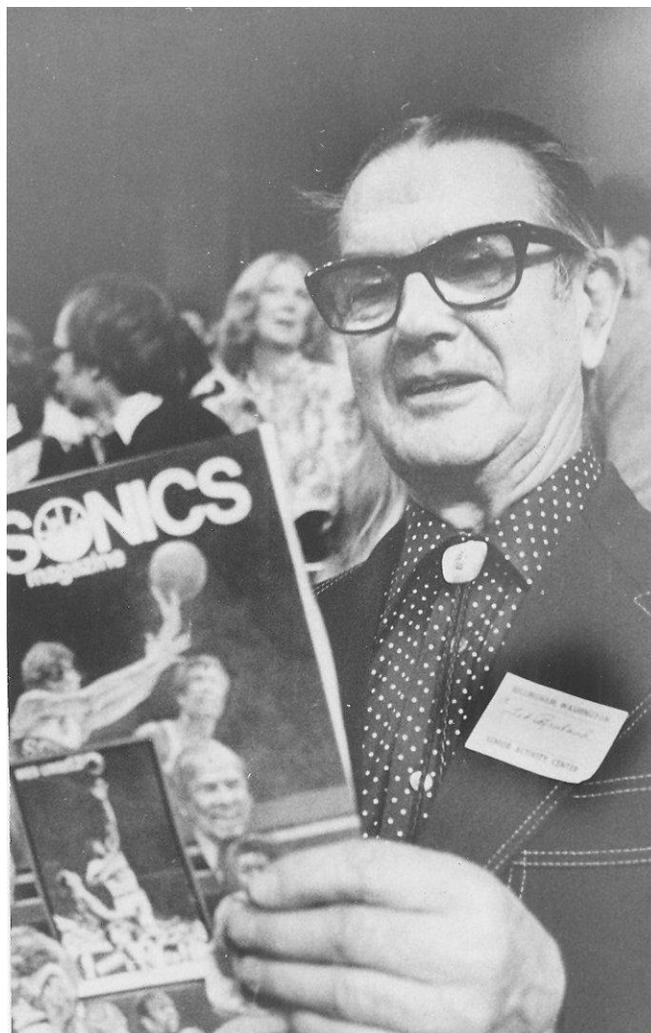
Figure H: Camp Fire Girls attend “Fun-Fest” hosted in the Armory, 1949.



**Figure I: Unused Civil Defense survival gear being shipped out of the Armory, September 1974. During the Cold War, the Armory was designated as one of the city's fall-out shelters in case of nuclear attack.**



**Figure J: Roller skating panorama, January 3, 1981.**



**Figure K: Ted Bruland, first owner of the skating rink inside the Armory.**