

ISSUE 2

2016

# KIRKMAN HOUSE MUSEUM

LIFE AND TIMES OF  
WILLIAM GREER KIRKMAN  
NEW PERMANENT EXHIBIT OPENS  
RESTORATION UPDATE  
BEGINNINGS  
KIDS FIRST

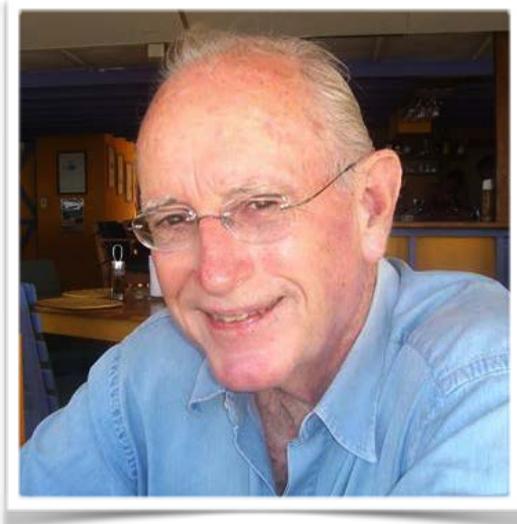
THE FIVE YEAR PLAN  
HOW CAN YOU HELP



# William Greer Kirkman,

April 9, 1937 to March 19, 2016

William Greer Kirkman, the great-great grandson of the first William Kirkman, was born in Portland Oregon and grew up in Vancouver, Washington with his parents Elizabeth and Bill and his younger sister Ruth. His family moved to Walla Walla in the summer of 1953 before his sophomore year in high school. He graduated from Walla Walla High School in 1955 and entered Whitman College where both his parents were alumni. He worked summers in harvest and between his junior and senior year in college he took a grand tour of Europe with two of his fraternity brothers on Vespas.



Bill's first job was as a teller at Baker Boyer Bank. Soon he became restless and decided that he wanted to do something beyond Walla Walla invoking the life and adventures of his ancestor and namesake William Kirkman whom he saw as a pioneer and risk taker. As a result, he and his wife, Carol White Kirkman, moved to Phoenix Arizona to attend the American Institute for Foreign Trade, at the time called "Thunderbird," where they spent two years learning languages and culture and Bill received a Post Graduate Business degree in Foreign Trade.

Fresh out of graduate school he accepted an offer from Citibank and the couple was sent to New York for training. The first foreign assignment was to Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1963. Their first child, Elizabeth Ashley Kirkman, born in New York City, was an infant when she traveled to Panama City, Lima, Peru and Santiago Chile on the way to their new home in Argentina.

During their two years in Argentina a second child was born, a daughter, Jennifer Greer Kirkman. While stationed there the couple traveled to Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. In 1965 Bill was transferred to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic where he would spend the next 51 years.

In 1968 he was named Citibank manager in Santiago, the second largest city in the country. He took charge of selecting a location to build the new Citibank branch. Their third child was born soon after the move, a boy, William Allen Kirkman. After several years in Santiago, the bank offered Bill a position as second in charge in Puerto Rico. At the same time he was offered a position with a local food processing company. He was very happy to stay in the country as he felt it was the land of opportunity. During his years representing the Industrias Portela, he became interested in tourism. The island country was in the early stages of recognizing a need for an "industry without smoke stacks," tourism.

Bill set about searching for land appropriate for tourist development on the north coast of the Dominican Republic. He spent weekends searching for the right property. He was fortunate that some of the Jewish settlers who arrived in the DR in 1940's were now retiring and wanted to sell their lands. Bill ended up purchasing two adjoining properties in 1972 for a total of 250 acres that are now Sea Horse Ranch. While he waited for tourism to develop he continued to work for Industrias Portela and to manage the properties as dairy farms over the next 14 years.

Early on he sold a few lots to help with the land development costs and built and lived in the first "villa" on a spectacular ocean front lot. In time his job at Industrias Portela ended and he was spending full time on tourism development.

Over the next 30 years Sea Horse Ranch became what it is today with 110 residences with pools, a beach club restaurant, a unique common area pool, clay tennis courts and an impressive horse stable with an adjoining show ring.

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Cover: Kirkman family and friends celebrate the life of William Greer Kirkman



## **Weavers and Spinners** of Walla

Walla fiber arts guild held a silk dyeing workshop at the museum on June 11. The group dyed white silk scarves using two different techniques to achieve their results.

Some scarves were dyed with pieces of recycled silk fabric and others were dyed with powdered dye sprinkled on ice cubes covering the fabric.

## **Kids First**

Hands on History summer program will kick off with Campfire on Tuesday July 5<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday July 6<sup>th</sup>. The kids will be learning about the Revolutionary War. Tuesday will be the events that led up to the War, The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere and making of lanterns. Wednesday brings the Battle of Bunker Hill to Walla Walla with a reenactment fought with water balloons. We will finish the day with a little history of the major battles and the Treaty of Paris that officially ended the war.

## **The Little Black Dress**

On exhibit throughout 2016

Our exhibit features not only a variety of historic black frocks, but also charming jackets and capes. Clothing styles from every era are on display: severe, fancy and whimsical. Come and see the Little Black Dress from the 1800s to the present!



## **Garrison School Visit**

Kirkman House Museum was visited by over sixty 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders one day in June. Beth Clearman and Conor Fish, teachers at Garrison Middle School, scheduled Kirkman House as one of the nine stops around Walla Walla for their Explorer students. The students were studying Entrepreneurship and Washington State history so Kirkman House was an ideal place to visit. From our docents the students learned about the Kirkmans and their involvement in farming, ranching and retail. The students asked good questions about what it is like to run a nonprofit museum and how the facility is funded and maintained. They especially enjoyed our brand new gallery exhibit that features a wall-sized 1884 map of Walla Walla and historic exhibits that show how much our community has grown and changed over the years. The Explorers' visit was a great experience for everyone, and Kirkman House Museum's Kids First grant made it possible to cover the students' admission.



## **Tommy Breeze, Whitman Student and Board Member**

Kirkman House Museum first met Tommy Breeze, art history major at Whitman College, through his involvement with our World War II exhibit. Tommy's research and posters covering the airbase and the Whitman V-12 program were a very helpful contribution to our exhibit. It turned out that he was fascinated by Walla Walla history in general and was particularly interested in the workings of a museum. We asked him to join our Kirkman House Board as our first ever student board member. During his time with the museum he did extensive research, wrote text for our Kids First ebooks, and contributed consistently to our Sustainable Funding planning. Tommy has graduated and is now associated with the Marin Museum of Bicycling in California. We miss him, but the Board benefited from his participation and we are grateful for his creative contributions to Kirkman House projects.

## Restoration Update

Restoration projects are underway to restore the internal gutter system and two rear chimneys. Both projects should be completed by the end of June.



## In the Beginning

By Tim Copeland

Kirkman House Museum exists today because of many happy accidents. This is the first chapter of a much longer story.

Walla Walla has long been known for its stately homes, beautiful trees and exquisite downtown architecture. But by the early 1970's, much of the community's historic architecture seemed badly threatened. The Stencil Building had been demolished. The Jones Building had been devastated by an ill-conceived "modernization." Steel siding and big neon signs covered most of Main Street's second-story frontages.

Concerned by these assaults on Walla Walla's architecture, a small cadre of energetic women organized Historic Architecture Development (HAD) in 1974 to raise public awareness and generate support for historic building preservation. Erma Jo Bergevin was the leader of that group and was ably assisted by Peggy Hoyt, Helen King and Bernice Stevens.

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## The Five Year Plan

Kirkman House is a beautiful Italianate style brick Victorian Era house – a house showing its age. At a quick glance it looks to be in reasonably good shape. However upon close inspection there are many issues that need to be addressed. The entire exterior of the house, including the foundation is unreinforced masonry and need attention, the window frames are in varying degrees of deterioration, and most of the soffits are in even worse shape. Many historical features of the house are missing or have been painted over. Cabin B and the Carriage House are in desperate need of renovation.

We are working on The Five Year Plan to complete all of these brick and mortar projects, which will not only improve guests' experiences, but will greatly prolong the lifespan of the house itself. A significant part of this plan will be to improve the grounds and outbuildings to provide a beautiful event location for the community, as well as a steady rental income stream for the museum. ADA access to the museum, bathrooms and the grounds will be included.

Sherwood Trust has gotten us off to a great start with a \$100,000 grant to help strengthen the foundation, and we have applied to the state's Heritage Capital Fund for a \$90,000 matching grant. These two grants represent about one quarter of what we will need to complete these projects. More grants will be applied for in the next few months but community support will still be needed to help meet matching requirements for these grants.



## How can you help

Because you are reading this we know you realize the value of having a museum like the Kirkman House in the community. You can help in any of three ways.

1. Make a contribution to our capital projects which will be multiplied by grants.
2. Invite a friend to visit the museum with you. Many community members don't even know the museum even exists, so the more people we can educate about what we do the more support can be garnered.
3. Volunteer some time. There are many tasks that need to be done. Things as simple as grounds maintenance, helping with an event, or joining the Board.
4. Donate construction materials or professional services. Many of our upcoming projects will require construction material of all types and the more that is donated the further cash contributions will go.



Second Sundays - Spin-Ins

## 2016 Events

- October 1 – Sheep to Shawl
- October 22 – Victorian Ball
- November 5 – Whispered Memories Psychic Fair
- December 1, 2 – Holiday Bazaar
- December 3, 4 – Kirkman House Live, Christmas Concert
- December 3 – Victorian Christmas Open House
- December 11 – Winter Maintenance Closing

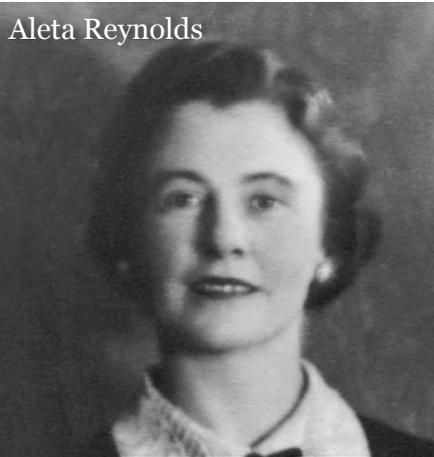
At the recent celebration of life for William Greer Kirkman the museum served Potato Chip Cookies from a recipe that was a favorite of Kirkman family member Aleta Reynolds. They are quite delicious.

### Potato Chip Cookies

Mrs. William Allen Reynolds (Aleta)

- 1 cup butter
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 cups flour
- ½ cups crushed potato chips (ridged are best)
- ¼ cup pecans

Beat together butter, sugar and vanilla. Add flour, then stir in potato chips and pecans. Roll into little balls and criss cross with with fork. Bake at 350 degrees for 12 minutes.



### In the Beginning continued

I was a freshly-minted commercial loan officer working at Seattle First National Bank. A few years earlier, I'd worked at a bank in Seattle located a few blocks away from Pioneer Square. I spent many lunch hours exploring the Square and Occidental Street as buildings there began to be preserved. A proposal to replace the area's historic buildings with large parking garages had just been stopped by Seattle's voters. The Pike Street Market was also saved from destruction through similar citizen action in that year.

When Jo Bergevin discovered I was interested in architectural preservation she invited me to join HAD's board. I soon became its treasurer and later its president.

HAD's primary work involved educating the public about historic preservation. It helped many landowners get their properties placed on the National Register of Historic Places, arranged clinics on how to preserve historic properties, and built a broad base of community interest in preservation. It did this with no staff, few volunteers and

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Directors  
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Bari Scott  
Kt Sharkey  
Susan Swayne

Special Thanks  
Binder Sign  
Joe Drazan  
Ellen Saager

**William G. Kirkman** continued from page 2

Bill enjoyed the fruits of his creativity for many years living in his house on Sea Horse Ranch and participating in Dominican life to the fullest. He enjoyed music and was an avid supporter of the arts.

He found time to play golf, tennis, and to travel the world. In 2007 he traveled around the world with his daughter Jennifer. His last major trip was to Kilimanjaro with his son Guill in 2010.

He was named the American Consul for the North shore of the Dominican Republic and served as President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Santiago. He was the first and at the time only American to be deeply involved in the promotion of tourism. His friends were as diverse as his interests and he knew no strangers.

He enjoyed his family, three children and six grandchildren as well as his extended family.

He was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2007. Perhaps he was fortunate to have short term memory loss as he never realized the full implications of the disease. He loved life and hung on valiantly and was in good health in every other way. He was lovingly cared for and died peacefully in his home with all his caregivers around him including daughter Jennifer.

News of his passing generated an outpouring of condolences and respect for man who was a visionary, generous, and a person who loved life and lived it to the fullest.

## History footnote.

When Bill was sent to the DR in 1965 the country was occupied by the inter-American forces. He went to his new assignment without his family as the country was still in turmoil after the revolution.

Bills first trip to the north shore where he would eventually establish Sea Horse Ranch, was over pontoon bridges supplied by the American military, and roads that could hardly be called highways. Accommodations were rustic at best and few to be found. The road along the beach between Sosua and Cabarete was sand. This would be the first time he laid eyes on the land was to become his lifelong endeavor. It was here that he had his first contact with the Jewish community when we met Pablo Cohnen,

who was a refugee years earlier from the Second World War in Europe and Hitler's death camps.

Northern European Jews were accepted by the then dictator Trujillo in order to populate the north part of the country especially with Northern Europeans settlers in order to prevent the Haitians from crossing the border and settling in the northern part of the



sea-horse-ranch.com

Dominican Republic. Trujillo was massacring Haitians at an alarming rate and to detract from this atrocity, during the Evian conference he willingly offered to accept Jewish refugees from Europe who were at the time unwelcome in the United States.

Because Bill arrived on the north coast at a time when original settlers were ready to retire and sell their lands, he had a unique opportunity to acquire shoreline property. The settlers were uninterested in the tourism aspect of the land. The farms produced enough income to cover the expense of holding the land. The milk production was purchased by the Jewish run cooperative, CILCA for milk and cheese. The cows were also slaughtered for meat processing by the same cooperative.

As the settlers began to depart their positions were occupied by Dominicans and finally the beginnings of tourism changed the face of the once sleepy Jewish residential town of Sosua.

The area was first occupied by United Fruit, followed by the Jewish settlers and Bill was fortunate to be at the forefront of what is now present day full blown international tourism in the Dominican Republic.

## In the Beginning continued

little money. It offset these deficiencies with lots of energy and a laser-focused purpose.

The Land Title Building at First and Main would not be standing without HAD. In 1976, the Schwartz Building stood at that site housing Bendix Music Store and Dickey's Barber Shop among its tenants. The building had been placed on the National Register with HAD's assistance but its owners then sold it to the Fidelity Mutual Savings Bank in Spokane.

Concerned about what the bank would do to the Schwartz Building, Erma Jo Bergevin, Bunny Stevens and Peggy Hoyt drove to Spokane to meet with the bank's president, Ed McWilliams. McWilliams was a gracious, farsighted executive who understood the bad publicity that could arise if his bank destroyed a beloved landmark of a community in which he wanted to do business. After meeting the HAD group, he agreed to commission a study of renovating the building instead of demolishing it.

The study concluded that renovation wasn't practical but HAD also explained why the bank's plan for a replacement structure was wholly incompatible with Walla Walla's historic downtown. McWilliams was given a list of two dozen elements HAD wanted in a new building including brick construction, two stories, arched windows, multiple tenants, and a commercially-active second story. Most of HAD's list was incorporated into the building that stands there today. The bank is gone but its trademark roses are alive in the plaza's brickwork.

Throughout its existence, HAD was controversial. Some people thought that it intruded on the rights of private property owners. Others didn't like Walla Walla's "old-fashioned look" and hoped we'd replace

it with a downtown shopping mall. A few critics called HAD's supporters "communists."

HAD continued its evangelism for community historic preservation until Carolyn Retzer offered her house for sale to HAD for \$50,000 in 1977.

Carolyn had been approached by various commercial interests that wanted her property for its land value. She was operating it as a third-rate apartment house, an unattractive enterprise for most prospective purchasers. A commercial parking lot seemed like a better use to many.

Jo Bergevin and Peggy Hoyt strongly argued that HAD should buy the property, restore it and operate it as an historical house museum. HAD didn't have \$50,000. It had no budget for restoration. Over a dozen apartments had occupants and no one but Jo knew anything about apartment management. On a split vote, the board approved the purchase. And HAD's mission completely changed.

At a board meeting right after the sale had closed, a member said he felt like a dog who loved chasing cars but, now that he caught one, didn't know what to do with it. I was in that camp. But Jo, Peggy, Helen and Bunny knew what they were going to do. And they set about their work.

I left the HAD board then and became involved with the Main Street Foundation. My interest in historic preservation was undiminished and it was clear that HAD could no have a community-wide role in that initiative. The Main Street Foundation soon filled that vacuum. Its championship of

the Downtown Revival of 1994 laid a foundation for historic preservation that has been built on for over 20 years.

So, as HAD's first chapter closed, its second one opened. That will be the subject of next quarter's article.



Tim Copeland

# Kirkman

HOUSE MUSEUM

214 NORTH COLVILLE STREET, WALLA WALLA, WA 99362

Consider renting the museum for a company meeting or party.



Make a donation or renew your membership today at: <http://tinyurl.com/ooy2qpb>

Rick Tuttle and Susan Monahan have been working diligently on a new permanent exhibit called 'Windows to the Past, Placing the Kirkmans in context within Walla Walla.' A highlight of the exhibit is the 96 inches wide by 70 inches tall 1884 map of the city. Get a glimpse of the environment in which the Kirkmans lived from the 1880s to the early 1900s.

